







「もう、どうして
そんな顔するわけ？
もしかして
似合っていない？」
一度席を立て、くるりと
ターンしてみせるマサムネ。

ま
ち
キ！



突如。
あり得ないほど唐突に。
涼月は、自分の胸にいる近衛の方を向いてから――
**執事くんの口唇を
――奪っていた。**

ま
ち
キ！



Chapter 1: Sponger Days

November arrived. The summer heat that made the asphalt melt had long disappeared, and instead grew cold according to the surrounding early winter air, announcing a change of seasons. However, that was only the blessing of fall. Chestnuts, persimmons, saury...it's the season for peculiar tastes such as these, as the days were oddly peaceful. Of course, that was the same for me.

"Here, it's done, stupid chicken."

"Ohh, thanks a bunch, Masamune."

After I gave my proper gratitude, I accepted my breakfast, as well as the miso soup. What use is there to hide this? I was in Usami Masamune's room. She is a fellow second-year student at Rouran Academy, and a member of the handicrafts club.

Today is the 14th of November, a Sunday. Through various ups and downs, it was decided that me and my little sister Kureha would be living in her apartment, located in a high-class flat, and it's already been a month since we moved in here.

"Where's Kureha?"

"Probably still sleeping? She's got a bad habit of sleeping in, right?"

We sat at a luxurious and large table located in the kitchen. Still wearing her apron, Masamune sat down on a chair facing me.

"Same as always, then. Should we eat before her?"

"Sure, let's. I'd feel bad waking her up."

"Guess so. Just wondering though, Masamune."

"Hm? What's up?"

"What's that outfit about?" I said to Masamune.

She's wearing a swimsuit plus apron combination. In other words, she barely wore anything. Don't ask me why, but she had put an apron over her orange swimsuit, sitting on the chair like it was totally normal.

"What are you talking about? I'm wearing this to cure your gynophobia of course."

"That's quite the aggressive treatment, alright."

"Living here together with you for one month, I realized. With any half-baked methods, there's no way we'll get to cure your gynophobia. That's why, you also need to get used to looking at women like this."

"I seriously doubt there will be such a subliminal effect..."

I mean, because Masamune looks like this, I can't help but become conscious of her as a girl, but...

"What's that gloomy look for? Does it not look good on me or something?" Masamune stood up, and twirled on the spot once.

.....This is bad. This might actually be much more destructive than I initially assumed. A swimsuit apron is no joke. To think she'd pull out the big guns like this. This world is a crazy place.

"But, why did you go for such a maniacal outfit?"

"Eh? You like this sort of stuff, right?"

"I sure don't."

"...Stupid chicken, why are you taking my feelings into consideration? We've been living together for a full month now, there's no need to hide it."

"If anything, you stop acting so kind now!"

Was I the type of character who had such messed up interests!? I mean, if she was wearing a garter belt now, that might have been the best combination possible, but still.

“First up, aren’t you embarrassed looking like that?”

“Not really? Just to let you know, but since we’re living together, this much is normal.”

“Really now...”

“More importantly, haven’t you forgotten something, stupid chicken?”

“Yeah yeah.” I let out a sigh, and faced my food, saying ‘Thanks for the food’.

Today’s menu is steaming hot rice, together with grilled mackerel, giving off a delicious scent, as well as clam miso soup, and natto. Any person with Japanese origin would grin in joy at this course. Ahh, I’m glad I was born in this country. And as I was thinking that, I stuffed my mouth with the food.

“...How is it?” An anxious voice rang out.

I turned towards the source of that voice, and found Masamune giving me a worried gaze. After living together with her for a whole month, so I know just what she wants to hear.

“Yeah, it’s really delicious. Thanks, Masamune.”

“It’s...it’s not like I wanted you to thank me or anything. I just wanted your impressions, as the person who made the food...!” Masamune must have been embarrassed to be praised like that, because she slurped up some miso soup.

Living together with her for such a long time, it’s painfully obvious. She’s actually a bit of a spoiled child. It might be because of her environment, but she’s like a rabbit who likes attention from its owner, and wants to be praised for doing well. When I look at her that way, she sure can be cute.

“Still, I’m glad that we get to live here, you really saved us.” I took out the bones from the fish, as I spoke up.

Until last month, Kureha and I were staying in the residence of

Suzutuski Kanade. Since I was treated like a dog at best, and toy at worst, making me feel like I was working for a black company, this kind of lifestyle is like a blessing.

‘—I will have you become my family!’

It’s all thanks to Masamune saying that. Her apartment was way too big for a single high school girl anyway, and Kureha and I could easily inhabit other rooms, so I’m honestly grateful.

“...Yeah. But, I’m also happy.”

I didn’t expect to hear these words from her mouth. It even made me go ‘Eh?’ in shock, as I stared at her.

“I’ve been living here all on my own, so having you two with me is much better. It’s gotten a bit more chaotic for sure, but this isn’t all bad.”

“Masamune...”

“W-What!? Don’t look at me like that! I’m feeling embarrassed enough already!”

“There’s nothing to be embarrassed about. If anything, when I headed to the supermarket yesterday was far more embarrassing.”

“Hm? What happened?”

“You don’t even remember? When we went to buy dinner yesterday, the lady working there teased us with ‘Oh my, oh my, newlyweds?’, right...”

“Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaah stop, stupid chicken!”

Masamune finally remembered the scenery I was talking about, and started blushing furiously, flailing her arms up and around. Well, we are living together, so it makes sense that she would get the wrong idea like that.

“.....”

Though, it's just as Masamune said, this sort of thing isn't bad once in a while. How do I say this, this atmosphere just feels so warm and comfortable. Looking at that detrimental event that happened in October, this is doing wonders. After all, that was my first experience. Now I'm feeling better, and it's all thanks to Masamune.

"Ah, stupid chicken. You have some rice on your cheek."

"Eh? Seriously? Where?"

"Ah, stupid, not there. Geez, you're helpless, I'll take it off for you."

"Eh...No, you don't have to. I mean..."

"You mean?"

"Well...it's embarrassing."

"...What are you talking about? Yesterday we...even slept in the same room..."

".....!"

I remembered the scenery from the previous night, and started blushing. To put it simply, it was all Kureha's fault. She went and rented a DVD at a sale, and that turned out to be a horror movie. Not to mention that it was quite the shocking and maniacal one, so all three of us were shaking in our boots while watching that.

The problem is what happened after that. For some reason, Masamune came to my room once we decided to head to bed. She herself said 'Y-You're wrong! The feng shui is telling me that sleeping in this room today will give me better luck!' or something like that, but she was clearly just too afraid to sleep on her own. Also, I bet she doesn't even believe in feng shui.

Either way, as I tried to deal with my embarrassment, Masamune slept in the same room as me...Of course, I'm betting my pride as a man on the line, and state that nothing of what you may think of happened. After all, I have my gynophobia.

"....."

But, how do I say this, I think sleeping in the same room was too much after all. That actually makes us seem like newlyweds...

“Come on, I’ll pick it off you.”

“Ah.”

As I was thinking about that, Masamune already grabbed the rice grain from my cheek. She carried the small grain into her own mouth, and...Wait, why is she just eating it?

“W-What? It would be a waste, right?”

“I mean...that doesn’t mean you should just eat it.”

That’s hella embarrassing. Thanks to that, I could feel my face growing even hotter.

“Hey, stupid chicken.” I was trying to cool down a bit, when Masamune muttered with a quiet voice. “...Can I sleep in your room again today?”

“Huh? I don’t mind, but are you still scared or something?”

“S-Shut up, okay! That movie was just...too much. People were dropping like flies.”

“Well yeah, it is a horror movie.”

“Not to mention...sleeping next to you calms me down.”

“.....”

Um, Masamune-san, could you not blurt out embarrassing stuff like that? Rather than cooling down a bit, my body is burning up even stronger, it might accelerate global warming.

“.....”

Then again, just as she said, something like this isn’t bad in a while. A sweet and comfortable lifestyle, the exact opposite of the chaotic and hellish life at the Suzutsuki Residence. Thinking about it, since I

was raised in a house of wrestling maniacs, I probably always wished for this kind of relaxed day to day life. It's like a dream come true, I'm so happy.

Soon enough winter will come around, and the air will get cold, but I'll surely survive with the warmth filling this apartment. And in the meantime, I'll continue to live this dream of me and Usami Masamune living a happy life together—

♀ × ♂

“Wake up already, stupid chicken!” A cold and piercing voice pulled me out of my slumber.

At the same time, a sharp pain assaulted my stomach, making me scream like a cat that just had its tail stepped on, my body folding up into a beautiful V. Indeed, I was woken up by a beautiful axe kick. Damage-wise, it felt like Masamune held back a lot, but it was plenty to wake me up for sure. It was quite the fresh way of waking up, although much more kind compared to Kureha's way of waking me up.

“...Y-Yo. Morning, Masamune.” I took a deep breath, and finished my greeting.

Checking the time, it was currently half past 7am. Next, I spotted Masamune's long leg, wrapped in black kneesocks, stepping onto me. Of course, she wasn't wearing any aggressive swimsuit apron, but normal casual clothes.



“Don’t ‘Morning’ me, okay. You’re honestly awful at getting up in the morning. I don’t blame your little sister for waking you up with wrestling moves.”

“You still don’t need to kick me, right?”

“I didn’t kick you, I was stepping on you.”

“What’s the difference!?”

“I mean, no matter what I said, you wouldn’t wake up. Also, were you having a weird dream by any chance?”

“Eh...”

Huh? I wonder why, I can’t remember anything about that supposed dream. I feel like it was a pretty fulfilling dream, but...

“Well, I can tell it wasn’t anything worthwhile. You were grinning the entire time while you were sleeping.”

“It’s bad taste to stare at other people’s sleeping faces.”

“I...I wasn’t staring at anything! I was just stating what I saw!”

“Really now. More importantly, Masamune.”

“What do you want?”

“Can you take your leg off of me now? From this angle, I can see inside your skirt, which is bad for my hea—Guh!?”

Even though I was trying to be honest and straightforward, Masamune stomped onto my stomach once again. This time, with much more force.

“Dummy! Stupid chicken!” Masamune was fuming with anger, and walked back to the kitchen.

“...Geez.” I let out a sigh, and slipped out of bed to do some stretches.

I am the oldest son of the Sakamachi Family, I won’t break down from something like this. I’ve been through much worse.

“Ah, still...”

I wonder why...this lifestyle, this mood, I’ve fully gotten used to it now. It’s been one month since me and Kureha moved in here with Masamune. It feels weird to think that so much time has passed.

‘—I will have you become my family!’

With these words, Masamune used the master ticket that she got from Derechuki-san, and freed me and Kureha from that hellish place. Still, this is nothing but a fake family. After all...

“I’m still being treated the same way as over there.”

I looked at the sleeping space I just slept on, and let out another sigh. This might just be worse than what I got at the Suzutsuki Residence—Namely, a sleeping bag. You heard me right, I was using the balcony of Masamune’s apartment up on the high-class flat as my sleeping space, snuggling up in a sleeping bag every night. You really never know what will happen in life. I never would have imagined sleeping on the balcony of an apartment. Not to mention...

“This is my room, huh...”

I uttered the same words I voiced when I first laid eyes upon this a month ago—a cardboard box. It was put down in the corner of the balcony, a small residence that mainly consisted of cardboard. Not to mention that there was ‘Stupid Chicken’ written above the entrance, with unbefitting adorable handwriting. Indeed, this cardboard house is my home, and inside of that is the sleeping bag. This seriously is almost like—

“—A small dog pen.” I let out another sigh, and reminisced about the happy dream I had, the sadness and pain stabbing right into my chest as I did so. This is, indeed, reality.

Even if my current place of living changed, my treatment is the same—a dog.

♀ × ♂

“That can’t be helped, you know? After all, I decided to keep you two.”

Inside Masamune’s apartment, the living room to be exact, Masamune munched on a toast, and explained.

“Can you stop saying ‘Keep’? I really feel like an animal here.”

“Why?”

“Why, you ask...”

“I mean, this is my home. Since you two can’t cook, I have to take care of that for you. Not to mention that I do the other housework and laundry...”

“...I’m terribly sorry. It’ll make me feel even more awful, so please stop.”

“Not to mention that you’re forcing me to wash your underwear...”

“Can you not make it sound like I’m some deviant!?”

I’m properly washing my own underwear, right. By hand, not to mention. Over the past month, I’ve started to feel like a survivalist.

“What am I supposed to do? I don’t want to wash your underwear together with my own clothes.”

“Are you an adolescent girl or something?”

“I am, yes, what about it?”

“...Eh, you were?”

“What’s that supposed to mean!?”

“I mean, you feel more like a Mom than—Guho!?”

Masamune’s heel stabbed right into my shin beneath the table.

“What did you just say?”

“I-I’m very sorry...”

“This isn’t something you can just say and apologize later. One more time, and I’ll get rid of your cardboard box house.”

“...Yes, I understand, Masamune-san.” I could only lower my head in defeat.

Just sleeping on the balcony with a sleeping bag is tough. That old fart sure enough went through that himself, but I'm not as tough as him. Well, I know that I was a bit rude back there. After all, Masamune was kind enough to take us in. I'm just sponging off her. Since I'm handing off the monthly living expenses we get from Mom to Masamune, I at least get to keep some pride as a man.

"Also, why am I staying in a cardboard box anyway?"

"You asked me the same question a month ago, right?"

"Indeed, and I've been doing that every single day."

"Then you should know the answer to that already, don't you? That's more than enough for your room."

"...Didn't you say that we will become your 'family'? Is this how you treat family?"

"What are you talking about? Pets are family too, right?"

"....."

For some reason, Masamune's face didn't seem like she was joking about that. Why are human rights activists not targeting her? Won't somebody adopt me? I don't feel welcome here.

"Isn't it fine? A cardboard house is becoming a trend recently."

"I feel like a grade school student could come up with a better design for his summer homework."

"S-Shut up! I'm not some architect! I made something for you, so be thankful!"

"That doesn't explain why you have to treat me like a pet..."

"It's fine, this flat allows pets."

"That's not the problem here, clearly!"

"Then what's the problem? You were wearing a dog costume at

Suzutsuki Kanade's place, right? I think this is much better for you."

"Urk...!"

I can't argue back. It's true that this is probably better than when I lived at Suzutsuki's place. Sleeping on the balcony makes me feel like some plant rather than a pet or human being, but at least I'm not being worked to death. That being said...

"Hey, even if you and Kureha are using a room, there should be another one free for me, right? Can't you just let me stay inside—"

"Don't wanna." She said, clearly denying my hopes and dreams.

"Stupid chicken, it's not that I don't have any faith in you. However, you're an adolescent boy, so if I lower my guard once, you might just be tempted into doing something reprehensible."

"Reprehensible..."

"For example, secretly washing my underwear..."

"So me being a kind and caring husband is not good?"

"Y-Y-You're not my husband!"

"Why are you desperately denying that?"

"T-That's...Anyway! You'll be staying there. I can rest easy since I lock the door at night as well."

"You're the only one who's gonna rest easy."

Right now things are still fine since it's November, but once December comes around, I'll probably freeze to death, you know? I'm already living in a high-rise flat, that kind of death would just be pathetic.

"What? If you have any complaints, why don't you go back to that residence?"

".....!"

...I can't. That's the one thing I can't do. Because she—Konoe Subaru—is there. She's the girl I like. Last month, I finally realized my own feelings, and went all out to confess, but I was rejected without mercy. I was rejected with a clean cut. Basically, I'm sitting here with a broken heart.

'Man up, you pussy', I can hear a lot of people say, but they just don't realize what this feels like. Think about my feelings. It's been one month, and I have yet to get over her. Can someone cast hypnosis on me?

"Not to mention, one month ago, I asked you if you were really fine with coming to my place, right?"

"Yup, and I agreed back then."

Back in late September, they told us that the rebuilding of our house would take around two months, so I figured that I could leave Masamune's place right away, but life isn't as kind as that. Because of the heavy rain in October, the progress of the renovation was pretty much halted, and now it will have to wait until the end of the year. That's why Kureha and I are still living here.

"...Kureha? Could you grab the milk for me?"

"Y-Yeah. Here, Nii-san." Kureha sounded conflicted, as she grabbed the milk for me.

It was weird for her to be this silent. For the past month, the little monster of my family has been like this. The reason for that was the wrestling incident on the final day we stayed at the Suzutsuki Residence. I asked her to torment me more because I was just rejected, but that apparently turned into a trauma of hers. She probably thinks I've gotten batshit crazy.

Well, I really can't blame her for that. If I saw someone from my family end up like a psycho, I'd immediately send them to the hospital, or skip directly to the police. Either way, Kureha's gotten oddly docile as of late. She never even woke me up with her wrestling moves since. Thanks to that, Masamune's duty now was to wake me up instead. I'm happy that I was freed of the wrestling

wakeup, but since this turned into another part of my family life in a different way, I can't say I'm particularly happy.

"Anyway, it'll still take time until your house will be rebuilt, right? I'm letting you stay here. You should be thankful that you can stay in such a high-class flat." The dear apartment owner puffed out her chest.

...Oh yeah, talking about this flat.

"So, Masamune, haven't things...gotten a bit weird lately?"

"Hm? What do you mean?"

"I mean...Ever since Kureha and I moved in here, weird things have happened, yeah?"

"Hmm...You're not wrong, but it really wasn't that big of a deal, right?"

"....."

No no no, your mental strength is just far greater than ours, but this definitely is a big deal, you hear me? One month ago, when we came here, what first surprised us...was a supernatural phenomenon. Basically, there's a poltergeist around here. You may wonder why a poor girl like Masamune gets to live in such a high-class flat, but the reason for that is this was an actual haunted apartment, which drastically lowered the rent.

Right from the very day, I understood just why that was the case. Every night I'm plagued by sleep paralysis, I hear some weird rapping sounds, tableware placed somewhere none of us remembered, the TV turning on and off again, and other incidents and phenomena that were awful for my heart. No doubt about it, this place is cursed.

However, all of that stopped not too long ago. Personally speaking, I'm very happy about that, sure, but since it stopped so abruptly, I don't really know what to feel, and it's creeping me out more than anything. Just what...

"...Listen, Nii-san." There, Kureha was the one to open her mouth.

Before, she was terrified just staying in this place. At first, she pretty much slept in Masamune's room out of fear. That's right, she's absolutely awful with occult stuff. After all, she can't win against something that doesn't have a physical body. But, this is rare. I didn't expect her to bite on this topic she's bad at.

"Nii-san, can I tell you?"

"Y-Yeah, what's up?"

"The thing is...I've been trying to say this for a long time, but... around three weeks ago, during a certain night...I met them."

"....."

Immediately after she finished her words, I felt goosebumps all over my body. Who is she talking about? I wanted to ask, but my mouth wouldn't move. It's like I had a curse put on me.

"I think it was like 3am? I needed to go to the toilet, so I left the room...and then ran into them."

"Ran into...What?"

"As I said...them."

"....."

D-Don't tell me...is she talking about the Gs that haunt this place? And no, I'm not talking about a G*ndam or something like that. I mean the real GHOSTs.

"I was shocked, you know..."

"W-Well, I'm sure you would be."

If I ended up in that same situation, I'd be scared to death. Of course, besides the three of us, nobody is supposed to live here.

"She looked like a young woman wearing a white one-piece, with long hair, and she suddenly said 'Hey, how about we play together?', and then..."

“.....”

“I...I was really scared, so...”

“S-So...?”

Before I realized it, even my voice was shaking. If she's telling me this, then it can't be any laughing matter.

“I...I...” Kureha swallowed her breath, and continued. “I...threw her.”

“.....”

Alright, stop there, my sister. What the hell did you just say?

“As I said, I reflexively threw her.”

“T-Threw her...”

“Not to mention with a German suplex.”

“The heck are you talking about!?”

“Honestly, it was just in the spur of the moment. If that was a 2v1, I would have thrown the towel.”

“.....”

...Scary. Rather than some random ghost, I'm much more terrified because of my little sister who just pulled a German suplex on a G.

“So, this is where it gets important.” Kureha continued.

Eh? We're not done yet? Did she get possessed after that or something? That would be troublesome, we'd have to call for an exorcist right away...

“After I threw that woman, she slowly stood up...”

“Y-Yeah...”

“And then she looked at me with a super serious face, saying the

following—” She looked at me with wide open eyes. “Thank you very much, now I can finally move on’.”

“Like hell she did!” I screamed without restraint.

If this was a certain famous baseball manga, I would have flipped over the table without restraint.

“I-I’m not lying! This all happened!”

“Calm down, Kureha. You’re just tired.”

“I’m not tired either!”

“No, you’re probably possessed.”

“Possessed!?”

“Ahh, I’m sorry Mom, I couldn’t protect your daughter...”

“Please stop treating me like I’m dead already!?” Kureha was fuming with anger.

I mean, what kind of development was that supposed to be? She passed on because you German supplex’d her? Sounds like it could be straight out of a manga, but not reality.

“I mean, I thought it was rude to just do that to her right after we met.”

“Rather than rude, if you did that in the middle of town, you’d get arrested.”

“That’s why I decided to listen to Sakamoto-san.”

“Sakamoto who!?”

“Huh? I’m talking about that woman. We introduced ourselves to each other, and she told me her name.”

“Alright, I don’t even know how to react anymore, so can you stop with this episode already!”

Did she actually get possessed or something? Talking with ghosts definitely ain't normal.

"So then, according to her, she's pretty exhausted. You know, with the whole economic slump recently."

"I don't think ghosts are bothered by that."

"She said that watching TV all day just made her feel depressed."

"She's quite naive, huh..."

"That's why she decided to pass on. Honestly speaking, she got tired of playing with you, Nii-san."

"So all these supernatural phenomena around me were just her playing around!?"

I'm going to slaughter you, Sakamoto! No, wait. Sakamoto-san's already dead. Her main profession is being a ghost after all.

"So then, when I pulled a German suplex on her, she apparently felt satisfied."

"Why would a ghost feel satisfied after experiencing a German suplex?"

"According to her, she was a professional wrestler. That's why she wanted to be thrown like that one more time."

"What an awful lingering regret to have."

"After I did that, she said 'I can pass on now, right?', you know."

"You already passed on!"

You're dead! You already passed the goal, with the tape hanging around your waist! You only stayed in this world because you wanted a trigger to pass on, right!?

"She also said 'I'm sorry that you had to play along with my pranks to pass the time'."

“Wait, so all those supernatural activities that happened in here... were all her doing? All to pass the time?”

“Sakamoto-san said that she always loved scaring people. That’s why she gave it her best when she became a ghost.”

“Nobody asked her to do that, for Christ’s sake.”

What is she, some comedian who just debuted? She’s working so hard for all the wrong reasons. Think about my feelings, okay.

“Her final words were ‘Thank you, and goodbye’, and then disappeared.”

“She left pretty easily, huh...”

“Ah, actually, I just remembered. She said ‘Thank you, and goodbye...See you in hell, shitty four-eyes’.”

“Was that last remark really necessary, you wench!?”

“Nyahaha. It’s fine, Nii-san, she was probably just joking around. She had a great humour, I could tell.”

“That doesn’t mean she should wish for me to fall down into hell...”

Sakamoto-san, please end up in heaven, so I can meet you again once I pass on as an old man. I’ll give you a nice souvenir.

“Well, this happened about three weeks ago. I have the habit of being half-asleep if I wake up in the middle of the night, so I don’t know if this actually happened or if I was just dreaming. That’s why I never told you about it, but now that I spoke of it, I feel so refreshed~”

Kureha showed a joyful grin.

...Please let that be a dream. That’s what I wished from the bottom of my heart. That story just now can’t have happened in reality. I guess she didn’t tell us about it until now because she didn’t want to be thought of as crazy and delusional. That being said, it might just be a pure coincidence, but if all those supernatural phenomena now stop, I’m not complaining, and I’m sure Masamune should also be...

“Uuuu...Goodbye, Sakamoto-san...”

“Why are you crying!?” I threw in a retort.

As large tears came streaming down her cheeks, Masamune muttered to herself. Why is she so sad that Sakamoto-san passed on?

“S-Shut up, I can’t help it.”

“Why...are you so depressed now?”

“I mean, I’m always alone here, so having someone else with me was just so much relief for some reason...”

“.....”

I mean, this ‘someone else’ is a ghost. Also, she gets lonely pretty easily, huh? Despite being a nasty rabbit.

“.....”

Well, taking the environment she was raised in, I can’t blame her. Before we came here, she’s been living in this high-class flat all by herself. Of course, her family’s circumstances is an easy argument to seal this discussion, but she’s currently in a situation where she’s forced to live away from her parents. That’s why she’s probably lonely all the time. She’s still only a high school student like us. That’s why...us coming here might have been the most convenient move for her.

“Mnn, thanks for the food. Nii-san, I’ll do some practice for my club.” Kureha finished eating her strawberry jam toast, and clapped her hands together.

“Huh? Masamune, you’re not going with her?”

“I’m on break. It’s her personal practice, right? Who would want to practice on a Sunday?”

“Ehh? It’s fun, so just tag along!”

“The only person who would enjoy that kind of practice is the vice

prez. Ah, Sakamichi, will you be back by 3pm?”

“Ehmmm...I don’t know? It depends on the practice...”

“I see. There’s a special sale at the supermarket today, so if you can’t make it home by 3pm, I’ll take the stupid chicken with me.”

“Roger, Usamin-senpai.”

“...How many times do I need to tell you not to call me like that...”

“Nyahaha, isn’t it fine? We’re something like a family already. Anyway, I’ll see you later!” She said, and ran out of the living room.

She really does not know how to calm down. Also, what does the handicrafts club do for personal practice?

“Your younger sister sure knows how to cause a ruckus.” Masamune said, while putting away her tableware.

Oh yeah, Kureha’s feeling a bit better now. Maybe she really was feeling better now that she told us about Sakamoto-san? I don’t mind that she’s back in high spirits, but I hope she’s not going to torture me with wrestling moves again.

“Then again, being together with someone like her doesn’t hurt once in a while.”

“Eh?”

As I was lost in my thoughts, Masamune suddenly blurted that out.

“The thing is...since I’m an only child, I always wanted siblings.”

“H-Huh...”

“Wha...what’s wrong!? Why are you giving me such a complicated look!”

“I mean...you want siblings, but you know how she is, right?”

Sakamachi Kureha is far too dangerous. It’d genuinely be better to have her as an endangered animal under the Washington Treaty, and

put her into the Ueno Animal Zoo. Since I've lived together with her for the past ten years, I can confidently say that she's like a lion or a Siberian tiger. I never know when she'll eventually come to bite me.

"But, should be fine if you get used to it, right?"

"You can say that because you never got used as a punching bag for wrestling techniques."

"I'm sure you'll be able to tame her if you prepare food for her."

"See, you're seeing her as a pet!"

How far is she going to deny Kureha's human rights? Am I the pet dog, and Kureha the pet cat here? In return for having a place to sleep, we're being trained by her.

"I'm not planning on making her my pet or anything."

"Then why would you make it sound that way?"

"That's because...Calling you like a family face to face is embarrassing..." She muttered towards the end, as her cheeks were red.

Family, huh...It is pretty embarrassing, but looking at our current relationship, that term might be the closest...Kureha, Masamune, and I are living under the same roof. At first, I needed to get used to it a bit, but it's already been a month. Humans really can get used to everything out there, and I'm sure Masamune must be the same. She's gotten used to Kureha a lot. I could see them as sisters even. Honestly speaking, it was something I would have never imagined to see from her.

—After all, she was unable to put faith into people. Raised in a complicated family environment, she became unable to trust people. Even now, she's slowly opening up her heart to Kureha. Well, I bet that Kureha's personality did a lot to help with that. She's open with anybody, and is bad at lying. That's why this current relationship isn't too bad. She always wanted a family after all. At the same time, Kureha and I were looking for a place to live.

Us living together is probably the smoothest way to resolve all of these problems. It's like we're granting each other's desires. The reason Masamune uses the word 'Pet' is because she's embarrassed, I bet.

“.....”

And, I might have used this new lifestyle in order to forget about the incident with Konoe—my broken heart. Even now, I can vividly remember the scenery from back then. At the night parade, upon hearing my confession, Konoe bluntly rejected me...

“.....”

Oh yeah, we didn't really talk ever since back then. We said that we'd stay as best friends, but it's been awkward since. That's why I don't really know what to do. Because I haven't talked with her as a friend for such a long time, I'm still not over her.

“—!”

No, maybe it's just that I don't want to get over her? I mean, it's been a whole month since I was rejected, and yet—

“Now that breakfast is over, how about we start?”

A voice called out to me, I finally returned to reality. Standing there was Masamune, who had finished cleaning up even my own tableware. She wore a small pink t-shirt, together with a white shirt, and black knee socks. It looked like she was pretty conscious of her own appearance even at home. On the contrary, Kureha wore pretty loose clothes. It was always jerseys or pajamas.

“Also, what are we starting?” I asked, confused.

Today is Sunday. To us high school students, this should be a day of rest. So, why does she make it sound like we have some important plans today...

“...Are you still half asleep or something?” Masamune complained.
“We're going to fix your gynophobia of course.”

“.....”

...That's right. I completely forgot about that. Maybe I am still half asleep. Over this past month, as I was living here at Masamune's home, she's been doing some spartan attempts at curing my gynophobia. Since those days were far too stimulating and traumatising for me, I'd rather not go into detail here, but I probably suffered from a nosebleed and passed out as many times as there are stars in the sky. I'm a bit exhausted, if you catch my drift.

“Come on, don't look so bothered just by the idea of it. You want to get rid of your gynophobia, right?”

“Urk...I sure do, but...”

“Then you should be thankful, I'm going to help you with my own body.”

“Yeah, I guess...But, aren't you getting a bit too into it?”

I mean, she sure seems dead-set on curing my gynophobia. Is there any reason why she's this desperate?

“I-I'm not getting into it at all...It's just...”

“It's just?”

“A-As friends...I'm thinking that it would be good for you if you got rid of your gynophobia, so that you can experience love with a girl...”

For some reason, she started fumbling over her own words towards the end. Well, I can see that she's serious about wanting to help me, even if her methods are a bit too extreme. But, that's just fine. Ever since I left the Suzutsuki Residence, I haven't met Suzutsuki either. We would run into each other at school, but not talk much. It's almost like she's avoiding me. On top of that, the relationship between Konoe and Suzutsuki started looking a bit awkward lately.

“Then, let's start. Don't worry, I came up with a proper method today.”

“Urk...”

Hearing these words from Masamune sounded like a death sentence to me. Please, don't. All the methods she could come up with are pure torture to me. It's like shock treatment.

“Hehe, it's fine.”

However, to my surprise, Masamune said the following.

“Today's method is a bit more docile.”

“Eh?”

“I realized, you know. There's a fairy tale called ‘The North Wind and The Sun’, right?”

“North wind and the sun?”

Is that the one where the North wind and sun see who can make the traveller take off his clothes faster? The North wind immediately goes on the aggressive, trying to forcefully blow off the traveler's clothes, but that doesn't work out. The winner was the sun, who slowly warmed up the traveler to the point he would take off his clothes.

“Basically, it's the same as that.”

“You'll try to make me take off my clothes?”

“D-D-D-Don't be ridiculous!”

“Then what else are you planning?”

“You still don't get it? Basically, I've been acting like the North wind so far. I was too forceful in trying to make you get over your gynophobia. However, I'll change my approach now, and take it slow.”

“Take it slow...”

I have no idea what she's talking about. I just hope it's a warm and cozy method like the sun.

“By the way, if this method doesn’t work, I’m going back to North wind mode.”

“Huuuh!?”

“Isn’t that obvious? I don’t like spoiling others, so take today as a special service. If this doesn’t show any results, I’m going back to the spartan treatment.”

“.....” I felt a cold sweat run down my back.

Waaaaah, she’s putting so much pressure on me. She’s like scorching sunshine right now. Also, can a nasty rabbit like her even do some warm and cozy method?

“Alright, stand up.”

I felt anxious, as I stood up from my seat. This was her home, I had no right to disagree.

“Don’t move, okay?”

She said, and lined up next to me. We basically stood shoulder to shoulder.

“Alright, preparations are complete.”

“? Preparations?”

“Eh...t-that’s...”

“Also, can’t you tell me the method you came up with already?”

I want to at least mentally prepare myself. No clue what’s happening after all.

“Urk...O-Okay then...” For some reason, Masamune started blushing. “The two of us...will hold hands!”

“...What?”

For a second, I blanked out. I mean, compared to every other method Masamune came up with, holding hands was pretty tame. But...I

wonder why. Because it's so simple, and straightforward, I feel much more embarrassed.

“....!”

Ba-dump! I suddenly grew conscious of Masamune, as my heart skipped a beat. That's right, I've gotten used to it quite a bit over the past month, but...I still am living in a girl's room. I'm living with her. Of course, Kureha is living with us as well, and my room is a cardboard box on the balcony, so nothing lewd could happen, but I was pretty nervous at first. Recently, I've gotten much more used to it. That just means we've become more of a family. However, Kureha isn't here right now. In other words, it was just the two of us...

“C-Come on!”

Even as I was lost in my thoughts, Masamune tightly grasped my hand, which allowed me to feel her soft and feminine palm. That soft sensation, the warmth coming from it, and the faint beating of her heart...Damn it, this is more embarrassing than I thought. Since every other treatment was so far over the top, I somehow managed to hide my embarrassment, but since it's something as simple as that, I can't help but become aware of her as a girl—the girl I've been living together with for a month...



“—!?”

“Stupid chicken, are you okay?”

“Y-Yeah, somewhat...”

That was close, I got too conscious of her, my gynophobia exploded,

and I almost blanked out with a nosebleed again. This is tougher than I thought...

"We can stop if it's too much, you know?"

"N-No need to worry."

Rather, if I gave up here, I really would be nothing but a chicken bastard. Put up with it, me. That's right, I've been interacting with more girls since the beginning of the second year, so my gynophobia should have started to grow weaker compared to before.

—It's fine. If I stay calm, I can suppress the symptoms.

"....."

Silence filled the living room. I don't even know how much time has passed. All I knew was that my heart kept racing because of Masamune's hand holding mine, but I didn't have much room to think about that, as I was simply focused on suppressing my gynophobia...Urk, I'm slowly reaching my limit now though...!

"—It's fine."

Right as I was starting to break down, I heard a gentle voice from Masamune, one I would have never expected from her.

"I'm with you."

"...Yeah, thanks." I responded to her support, and gave her my gratitude.

...I can't keep losing like this. How pathetic would I be to make a girl worry about me. I should be fine just a bit more...!

"....."

And then, another long silence followed. The silence this time felt much longer.

"...Is this enough?" Masamune said, and suddenly pulled her hand away.

At the same time, I sank down on the floor.

“Wah, what’s wrong!? Are you okay!?”

“I-I’m fine, no worries. I just need a short break, then I’ll be fine.”

“...Really? If you say so...”

Masamune’s expression as she glanced down at me was riddled with anxiety after all. That being said...I feel like that treatment just now worked a whole lot. After all, I got to touch a girl for much longer than usual. The last time I touched a girl that long was probably when I hugged Konoe in front of her mother’s grave—

“—!”

Stop. Don’t remember it. I already got rejected by her, remember? And yet, why is my heart racing when I think about her?

“Hehe, seems like it worked just fine. You were holding my hand for a long time just now.”

Masamune seemingly felt like this treatment was successful, as she puffed out her chest with a smile. I guess this is a good first step. My gynophobia definitely is getting better. That’s why, this should be enough for today—

“Then, let’s move to the second stage.”

“Urk.”

“...Hey, what’s that face for? We finally saw some results, so we should keep the treatment going at this speed, right?” Masamune spoke with a tone like it was obvious.

Hey now, how warm of a sun are you? You’ll burn me to cinders at this rate.

“What do you plan on doing?”

“No worries, I already have a plan in mind.” Masamune puffed out her chest in confidence. “The two of us will be heading out to go

shopping now.”

“Shopping?”

“Exactly. I wanted to buy some clothes for the winter, so you’ll tag along. Of course, while we’re holding hands.”

“Huuuuuh!?”

“Hmpf, why are you so shocked? We’re just going shopping, that’s all.”

“B-But...”

I mean, heading outside while holding hands is embarrassing, you know? The two of us are often heading out to buy stuff, but in most cases, Kureha is with us. Now, it’s just the two of us. So...isn’t that basically a date?

“D-Don’t give me that. This is all for the sake of curing your gynophobia. I’m just as embarrassed, but it’s part of the treatment program.” She said, her cheeks beet red.

...Well, whatever. It’s been a month since Kureha and I started living here, so we’re pretty much like a family now. Heading out to buy food while holding hands isn’t...

“Then, I’ll go change. You do as well, and we’ll leave in thirty minutes.”

“That’s quite the long wait.”

“Don’t complain, a girl has to prepare herself for this kind of stuff.”

“Yeah yeah, I get it.”

I see no reason why she would have to put this much effort into her clothes. We’re not in a relationship where she has to worry about her hairstyle or perfume. Well, I guess worrying about that just makes her more girlish.

“Did you really? In thirty minutes, we’ll—”

There, a loud sound interrupted Masamune, right as she was about to leave the living room. **Ding dong~!**

“Geez, who is it at a time like this...” Masamune sounded a bit agitated, as she left the living room and headed over to the entrance to confirm who the visitor was using the small monitor next to the door.

...I wonder? Masamune doesn't have any friends, and she didn't mention anybody coming over. Maybe it's just another salesman? Or maybe Kureha forgot something? But, she should have a spare key... Hmm, I have no idea.

“Stupid chicken, come here for a second.”

Her exchange with the visitor must have finished, as Masamune showed her head in the living room. What, is it a visitor for me or something?

“This might be a bit sudden, but we're having visitors come over right now.”

“Visitors?”

“Yeah. Yesterday, my neighbour Sasaki-san moved out, and somebody else moved in.”

“Oh yeah, I heard some noise coming from there yesterday.”

I have no clue why they suddenly moved, but it probably was rather sudden.

“That person at the door was the caretaker. They told me that my new neighbours will be coming over to visit later.”

“Huh, that's pretty polite.”

Fairly rare to see that nowadays. Still, they must be pretty rich that they moved into this high-class flat.

“Ah, it seems like they're here.”

Someone knocked on the door of Masamune's apartment. Seemed to be the new neighbours she talked about.

"Stupid chicken, you don't need to meet them."

"I know that."

Nobody outside the Suzutsuki Residence's residents know that we are living together. Of course, the guys from the school don't. A high school boy and girl living together despite not being an actual family leaves quite the bad impression. The caretaker at least knows, I think, but maybe she's rather relaxed about this stuff, as she's letting us do this. Considering all of that, it would probably be best for Masamune to meet those guests herself.

"I'll be right back, you just wait here." Masamune said, and closed the door.

Well, staying here and waiting should be easy enough...

"....."

I just had the sudden urge to peek out of the living room. I mean, how could I not be curious? The people around me were all quite the peculiar folk, so I doubt I'll be surprised much no matter who it is. The hallway outside the living room leads directly to the front door. As I peeked outside, I saw Masamune just opening the door. Standing beyond that metal door was—

"!?" I froze up in shock.

"...G-Good morning."

A familiar alto voice reached my ears. Standing outside the door was a handsome boy with a slender body, wearing a butler uniform. That butler's face was all too familiar to me.

"...Konoe?" I muttered her name.

That's right, this was Konoe Subaru, who is working as a butler for the Suzutsuki Family.

“S-Subaru-sama?” Masamune was just as shocked, as she opened the door.

...What is going on? Why did Konoe come over to Masamune’s room? Also, the person visiting right now should be Masamune’s new neighbour...

“Good day, Usami-san.”

Next, a dignified voice spoke up. Of course, that voice was all too familiar for me. Behind Konoe stood Suzutsuki Kanade. She was my former master, and greeted Masamune with an expression like this was expected.

“W-Why are you here!?” Masamune screamed.

She’s always been on bad terms with Suzutsuki after all, being a rich lady and a commoner. Because of their difference in standing, Masamune seemingly can see right through all of Suzutuski’s lies, so they’re like mortal enemies. But, why? Why are they here?

“Fufu, don’t get so angry, Usami-asn.”

As Masamune and I were flustered beyond belief, Suzutsuki couldn’t be more relaxed.

“We only came here to introduce ourselves.”

“Eh...”

Masamune must have felt something because of Suzutsuki’s smile, as she froze up. Of course, I was the same. My brain cells stiffened up, and then started working again, like they rebooted...I have a really bad feeling about this. Something terrible is going to happen.

“That’s right, we came to introduce ourselves as your new neighbours.” Suzutsuki grabbed the hem of her skirt, as she showed a polite bow.

And then, she declared without hesitation, as we were still frozen.

“We are Suzutsuki Kanade and Konoe Subaru, who will be your new

neighbours starting today. Nice to meet you Usami-san and—Jirou-kun.”

Chapter 2: Neighbour Evolution

This might be a bit sudden, but when living in a rented flat or apartment, what is most crucial is your relationship with your neighbours. If you get along just fine, that's all well and dandy, but if you deal with someone who plays heavy metal until late at night, or constantly lectures you about how you should divide your trash, you tend to be exhausted fairly quickly. There are many things you need to be considerate of after all.

Despite that, having those two end up as our neighbours definitely is taking the cake.

“Here, some tea.”

“Fufu, thank you very much, Usami-san. But, only tea? I really wish you would have prepared some snacks for us.”

“So greedy. What about you, never heard of giving your new neighbours soba?”

“My, I’m sorry. But, rest assured, I have a few presents to celebrate our new relationship.”

“Presents?”

“Your utmost favorite—a carrot.”

“Are you making fun of me now!?”

“Oh, was one not enough?”

“Doesn’t matter if it’s one or two!”

“Then, what about ten?”

“Eh? That might actually help with finances a bit...”

“Fufu, you really are like a mother who loves to attend to the family finances.”

“Who’s a mother!?”

“...Hey, will you two finally drop it?”

We all sat inside Masamune’s living room. Masamune reluctantly invited Konoe and Suzutsuki inside, and prepared some tea so we could talk things out. Still, this situation is the worst. Since Suzutsuki and Masamune are archenemies, the atmosphere couldn’t be more tense. I doubt there was this much tension in the air at the Yalta Conference. Well, that’s not the only reason why the air feels so tense though.

“K-Konoe, you say something as well.”

“Eh...Ah, yeah.”

Konoe and I awkwardly exchanged these few words. Of course everything ended up awkward, since we never really talked after she rejected me. We promised to stay friends despite that, but things sure have gotten awkward.

“My lady, we really should properly give our greeting here.”

“Fufu, you’re right, Subaru. We actually moved in the room next to this.”

“...Hold on, you were serious about that?” Masamune asked, clearly cautious.

Yeah, I get how she’s feeling. They suddenly came here and introduced themselves as our neighbours after all. Not to mention that it’s Konoe and Suzutsuki. Something clearly is off here. I mean, they actually have a proper place they can sleep at, unlike me and Kureha. So, why would they suddenly move over here...”

“Fine, I’ll explain it.” Suzutsuki spoke up, answering Masamune’s question. “Basically, we decided to study society.”

“Study society?”

“Exactly. I am the person who will inherit the Suzutsuki Family, so I figured I should at least once live away from my parents, all by

myself.”

“All by yourself...But, you have Subaru-sama with you.”

“Subaru is the bare minimum of protection that I always keep with me, my butler. What’s important is that I live away from my parents.”

“...Fine. It’s a pretty forced explanation, but I’ll accept that for now.”

“Fufu, thank you, Usami-san.”

“But, there’s one thing I won’t just ignore.” Masamune glared at Suzutsuki. “Why did you have to move into the apartment directly next to mine?”

“Eh? That was a mere coincidence. You just so happened to live in the apartment next door, and—”

“Lies! There’s no way such a coincidence would happen!”

“Correct, I was lying.”

“You admitted it immediately!?”

“In reality, I thought it would be interesting. I mean, the time you were living at my residence was so enjoyable, remember? That’s why, I figured moving next to you would guarantee the most fun.”

“Y-You pleasure addict...!” Masamune bit her lip.

Well, that sounds about what she would do after all. We’re talking about Devil Suzutsuki, remember? She hates boredom, and prioritizes having fun over everything else. She herself sure had fun tormenting me over the one month I lived at her residence. She probably came over here, chasing me as a result of that...

“Hm?”

No wait, this woman, did she actually...

“We had actually planned on moving here earlier, but the negotiations took us a lot of time.” Suzutsuki let out a sigh, like she

actually was troubled.

...I knew it. She probably went through some weird negotiations in order to get this room from that Sasaki-san or whatever her name was. Really, Devil Suzutsuki is terrifying. I don't think she would use any violent methods, but...she probably paid her large sums of money. She never holds back, huh.

"That being the case, we ended up moving in right next to you. Please treat us well from now on, dear neighbour."

"H-Hell no! Why would I have to be neighbours with someone like you!"

"Did you not want us to get in the way of you and Jirou-kun living together?"

"Wha...what are you talking about!? That stupid chicken and I aren't in that kind of relationship! Not to mention that Sakamachi is here as well..."

"Right. Since it's three of you living here, nothing weird will happen."

"...Weird?"

"You don't get it, Usami-san? It would be a boy and girl living together in a flat. When I say weird, there's only lewd—"

"Shut up! Don't say any more than that! There's no way the stupid chicken and I would do something like that!"

"Really?"

"Really!"

"...Hmmm."

For some reason, Suzutsuki glanced over at me, and so did Konoe. Urgh, they clearly don't have any faith in Masamune and her words. I get that this entire situation of me and Masamune living together is easy to misunderstand, but...

“Usami-san.” Suzutsuki spoke up with an awfully cold tone. “Can I look around the place for a moment?”

“Huh? Look around the place...Why?”

“Isn’t that obvious? I need to confirm if you and Jirou-kun haven’t done anything weird.”

“Wha...As I said, there’s nothing going on between me and that stupid chicken...”

“There’s no proof that what you’re telling is the truth after all?”

“Urk...A-Also, why do you even need to look into that!?”

“My, I am the daughter of the board chairman of the school the two of you are attending. I won’t allow any students to indulge in any indecent relationships in such a flat like this.”

“Talking nonsense again to bring your point across...!”

“That’s why, could you please show me around? You agree with that, right Subaru?”

“Yes, if you say so, my lady.”

“Even Subaru-sama!?”

“Then, let’s go.”

“...Ah, hey, don’t just search around other people’s homes!”

As Suzutsuki and Konoe stood up from their seats, Masamune followed after. Also, look around the place...Are they some detectives searching for drugs? Knowing Suzutsuki, she probably just wants to have fun looking around Masamune’s place, but I didn’t think she’d take Konoe with her. Hmmm...Is it really that hard to have faith in me? I mean, when a young boy and girl live together like this, it wouldn’t be unthinkable that something of that sort could happen. That being said, in my personal case that is definitely impossible. After all...

“First, let’s go to Jirou-kun’s room. Jirou-kun, where is it?”

“Ah, it’s right over there.”

“Over there?”

When I pointed at the balcony, Suzutsuki showed a dubious expression. Following that, I showed her the cardboard house I’ve been living in, to which her expression changed into exhaustion and disbelief.

“...Hey, Jirou-kun.”

“What is it?”

“I told you to show me your room, right? I don’t remember asking to see a cardboard house built by a grade school student.”

Ohhh, amazing! Even Suzutsuki is shocked at this sight. Well, I can’t blame her, forced to look at this mess.

“...Jirou, that has to be some awful joke, right?”

Even Konoe looked at the cardboard house in disbelief. Both master and butler were in shock. I was genuinely just trying to tell them the truth...

“W-What are you doing, stupid chicken! That cardboard box is something I made as a joke!” I heard a voice from behind my back.

That voice belonged to none other than Usami Masamune. She was the creator of this cardboard house, no doubt.

“Suzutsuki Kanade! Stupid chicken’s room is over here!”

“Usami-san, is that true?”

“Of course! Do you really think I would lie about that!?”

“I mean, Jirou-kun has had this ‘Hey hey, what are you talking about, nasty rabbit? I’ve been living in this cardboard box for the past month, you know?’ look for a while now.”

“T-There’s no way that’s what he’s on about! Right, stupid chicken!?”

“...Y-Yeah.”

I couldn’t fight against the pressure coming from Masamune, and agreed with her. Honestly speaking, it’s exactly as Suzutsuki deduced. Also, why is she trying to hide the fact that I’ve been living in this cardboard house?

“...Hey, what is this about?”

I asked for an explanation, calling out to Masamune. Of course, using a quiet voice so that Konoe and Suzutsuki wouldn’t be able to hear me.

“I-I can’t change it! It’d be bad if Suzutsuki Kanade found out what kind of life you’ve been living here!”

“What kind of life...You were saying something about eco lifestyle and whatever during breakfast, right?”

“Urk...”

“Not to mention that you said my room is more than enough right now.”

“Ugh...Sorry, I’ll apologize. I’ll reflect on it. I definitely went too far with this one...”

“You don’t have to apologize that badly...”

She probably was embarrassed at the fact of us living together, so she pushed my living space out on the balcony. Also, Masamune and I are friends. There’s no way that it would happen, but in the one in a million chance, it would be bad if something happened. That’s probably why she went with the cardboard house.

“But, why’d you lie about that now?”

“T-That’s...” Masamune kept quiet for a moment, and continued. “If Suzutsuki Kanade saw you living in such a place, she might give you a different offer.”

“Offer?”

“For example, something like ‘If you’re forced to live in a place like this, why not come back to our residence?’, you know...”

“...Ahhh, I see.”

Yeah, Suzutsuki might say something like that. If anything, she enjoys teasing me, and playing around with me. That’s why she probably wants to keep me close to her. Compared to my living situation here, it’s been a lot better at her place after all.

“And then, you might leave...and Sakamachi will go with you back to Suzutuski Kanade’s place, so...” Masamune showed a somewhat saddened expression, as she muttered these words.

...What, that’s not like you at all. Basically, she’d be lonely with me and Kureha gone. She doesn’t need to be that worried, really.

“No need to be this nervous. I don’t know about Kureha, but until my home has been rebuilt, I won’t be leaving this place.”

“...Really?”

“Yeah, really.”

Also, living in the Suzutsuki Residence is impossible for me. After all, she’s there—Konoe Subaru. To be perfectly honest, I still don’t really know how to interact with her. I don’t think I’ve gotten over her just yet. That’s why, living here for a bit longer should be fine...

“I see...I’m glad...”

Masamune must have been relieved at hearing my words, as she sighed with a smile. **Ba-dump**, I felt my heart skip a beat after seeing her smile. I knew it, whenever she smiles, she’s so cute.

“What are you two whispering around like that?” Suzutsuki called out to us, seemingly having gotten suspicious. “So, Usami-san, where is Jirou-kun’s room?”

“Ah, the stupid chicken’s room is over there! It’s an empty room, so

—”

“Empty room?”

“...!? F-Forget about that! The room we’re going to definitely isn’t empty! After all, it’s the place where the stupid chicken lives!”

“Hmmm...I see. Can I take a look, then?”

“Of course!”

“Thank you, Usami-san. Then hurry and let’s go.”

“Eh, ah, wait!”

Suzutsuki pulled Masamune’s arm along, heading inside the apartment. If I had to guess, she probably is trying to sell that empty room as mine. If memory serves right, there were some private objects in that room, so it should be fine to sell it off as a room that’s being used. The current problem is rather...

“...J-Jirou...” I heard an alto voice next to me.

That’s right, since Masamune and Suzutsuki have left us, it’s just me and the crossdressing butler here.

“Y-Yeah, Konoe. Been a while since we talked, huh?”

“...Y-Yup, you’re right.”

We exchanged a few awkward words. That can’t be helped. After all, ever since I was rejected at that amusement park, we never really talked with each other. That being said, we’re best friends, so we should be able to get along just fine.

“T-That reminds me!” Konoe must have felt as awkward as me, as she spoke up. “This past month, how have you been spending your days?”

“How...Well, normally, I guess?”

“Really?”

“Are you...doubting my relationship with Masamune?”

“Urk...Because, it’s you two living here...”

“Don’t be ridiculous. Kureha’s here as well. Also, Masamune and I aren’t dating either.” I gave Konoe a straight explanation.

In response to that, Konoe sounded oddly satisfied, giving me a brief ‘I-I see...’. Maybe she’s curious about my possible romantic relationships, seeing that she’s my best friend? That happens a lot, right? If I got myself a lover, our time we could spend together would lessen. I’m sure she would support my love, but she still might be sad, who knows.

“Masamune is just a friend. She sometimes gives me treatment for my gynophobia, but that’s about it.”

“Treatment?”

“Yeah. Thanks to that, I’ve seen a lot of positive progress with my gynophobia. Of course, that’s also thanks to your and Suzutsuki’s help.

“.....”

For some reason, Konoe suddenly grew silent.....Hm? I wonder, did I say something bad? Did she not like the part about Masamune helping with my gynophobia? But, there weren’t many chances where she and Suzutsuki could help me—

“.....”

There, a certain question popped up in my head. Why have things gotten so awkward between Konoe and Suzutsuki? Maybe that’s related to why she’s suddenly gotten so quiet.

“...Jirou.” There, as I had gotten silent, Konoe looked up at me. “You just said that your gynophobia improved, right?”

“Y-Yeah, it’s a pretty spartan program, but I’m sure it’s gotten a lot better thanks to that.

“...I see. Then...can I test that?”

“Eh?”

I was about to ask ‘What do you mean by that?’, but it happened right after.

“...!? K-Konoe!?”

She suddenly closed the distance between us. Following that, she basically clung to me, burying her face in my chest, almost like she didn’t want her face to be seen.

“H-Hey, Konoe?”

Because of this sudden happening, I was at a loss for words, but still asked Konoe for confirmation. It’s true that having a girl this close to me would activate my gynophobia, but...

“...Jirou.” An alto voice pulled me deeper.

While she had her face buried in my chest, Konoe started talking. With a voice sounding like she was about to break out in tears.

“Can I...ask you something?”

“Ask?”

“Ahh, that’s right.” Konoe muttered, followed by a bit of silence. “— We are...best friends, right?” She asked with an anxious tone.



Hearing her words, my heart skipped a beat. Best friends. That's right, we are best friends. I should have known that, and yet when I hear it from her mouth, it just shakes me down to my very core. After the confession, I got rejected. That's why we'll stay best friends forever—

“...Jirou.” As I stayed quiet, Konoe continued with a voice about to disappear. “I want us to always stay best friends.”

“.....”

“When you confessed to me at the amusement park...I was really happy. But...we can't go out...”

“.....”

“That's why, I at least want us to be best friends...If we're good friends, then we can always stay together...even if we're not a couple...!” It almost sounded like she was holding herself back with something.

Despite that, she still pushed her body closer to me.

“.....”

Maybe...she was lonely this past month? Worried that because of my confession, everything turned out awkward. After all, we didn't talk much over this past month. That's why she must have been lonely.

“.....”

Reflexively, I put my arms around Konoe's back, ready to embrace her. My head was already spinning from my gynophobia, but that didn't matter. I...want to protect her. Those were my honest feelings. I want to protect Konoe Subaru. I want to hug her right now, and make her feel at ease. I want to leave this long silence that happened behind us. I want Konoe to smile, and not cry like she looked close to. After all—

“.....!”

In the end, I still love Konoe—

“What are you doing...you two?”

A voice suddenly called out to us, which led to both of us twitching in shock. Turning around. Masamune stood right at the entrance of the balcony. She probably came back from the room she wanted to show Suzutsuki.

“S-Stupid chicken, you two are boys, and yet you're this close with

Subaru-sama...Are you actually...into guys...?”

“No! There’s a reason for this!”

“A-A reason?”

“Y-Yeah! Konoe was just feeling a bit dizzy, so I supported him, that’s all!”

“...Subaru-sama, is that true?”

“!? Y-Yeah! That’s true! I was feeling a bit sick for a second...” Konoe panicked, and moved away from me.

Seeing that, Masamune let out a confused ‘...Hm’, and didn’t seem too satisfied. Wah, this is bad. This is the part where she’ll mistaken me and Konoe to have a gay relationship...!

“What are you doing?”

There, Suzutsuki appeared right behind Masamune. This is my chance. I needed to change the topic, so I turned towards Suzutsuki.

“Yo, did you see the room?”

“Indeed, I got a good look at what’s going on.” She showed a devilish grin.

...She must have seen through Masamune’s lie, right? There’s no way she’d look this joyful otherwise.

“Hey, Subaru.” There, she called out to her butler. “Why don’t you go see Usami-san’s room for now?”

“Eh? Why?”

“Isn’t that obvious? Maybe there might be something weird going on in her room?”

“Something weird?”

“For example...low-temperature candles¹?”

Hearing Suzutsuki's words, not only Konoe but Masamune equally let out a baffled 'Huuuh!?', frozen stiff.

"Wha...Wha...What are you talking about, Suzutsuki Kanade!? There's no way there'd be some S&M objects like that in my room!"

"Really?"

"Of course!"

"Even though you like that sort of stuff?"

"Can you stop pushing weird fantasies and fetishes on me? Also, that sounds more like it would be right up your alley."

"You think so? I feel like your and Jirou-kun's names fit that much better."

"...What do you mean?"

"SAKAMACHI and MASAMUNE, that's S&M, right?"

"Don't create some fake reality because of our initials!"

"My, I'm sorry. But, can Subaru still check out your room?"

"H-Hmpf, fine by me. Come on, let's go, Subaru-sama. It's totally fine, there's nothing weird in there!"

"Ah, wait a second, Usami!"

Masamune seemed to have become desperate, as she pulled Konoe along, away from the balcony.

"Fufu, now it's finally just the two of us." The rich lady smiled.

...She set me up. She sent those two away so that it's just the two of us. Now it's Suzutuski and me—Master and former servant.

"...What do you want with me?"

"Don't be so aggressive, please. I was just thinking that you've been indulging in quite the odd lifestyle. To think you'd be sleeping on the

balcony.”

“So you realized, huh?”

“Of course. Subaru does trust you, but Usami-san’s attitude was beyond odd. Well, I don’t know why she was so desperate to hide that fact.”

“She’s got her own worries to carry, so don’t look into it too much, okay?”

That’s right, Masamune was just scared, that’s all. She was afraid that Kureha and I might leave once Suzutsuki finds out. Then again, there’s no way I would leave here and move back together with Suzutsuki and Konoe though.

“...Huh, you’ve gotten pretty close over this past month, I see.”

“It really isn’t like that, though.”

“Since we’ve moved in next door, I’d like for us to get along, see.”

“...You used forceful methods to make people do it your way, right?”

“Now, I wonder what you might be talking about.”

“Can you really leave that residence of yours empty?”

“It’s fine. Mother and father won’t be back home for a while, so I let my servants take care of the residence. Ichigo was against it, though.”

“Of course, she’d probably cry tears of blood.”

After all, she deeply LOVES her rich lady after all. It’s honestly surprising that she didn’t forcefully tag along. Must have been a harsh order she got. Still, I didn’t think they would suddenly move like this. Since she enjoys pleasure and fun over everything else, she would do something as crazy as that, for sure. There’s no other reason I could come up with.

“But, I’m relieved. It doesn’t seem like anything weird happened between the two of you even though you’ve been living together.”

“There’s no way anything like that would happen. Masamune and I are friends.”

“.....”

Suzutsuki kept quiet for a moment, and then let out a dubious ‘Hmmm’. Man, she doesn’t seem like she’s believing me at all. Kureha’s with us, there’s no way something like that would happen. Right now, we’re more like family than anything.

“Also, why did you want us to be alone together like this?”

“Ah, that’s right, I completely forgot. There’s something I wanted to ask.”

—Something you wanted to ask?

I tried to return a question, but that’s when it happened.

“—!?”

Suzutsuki suddenly moved closer to me, reaching a distance where we could kiss at any second.

“...Tell me?” With a mere centimeter away from me, she used her beautiful red lips to form these words. “—Did something happen between you and Subaru?”

“Wha...Why are you asking that...”

“Don’t try to hide it. Ever since we went to the amusement park, something’s off about the two of you. During this entire month, you barely talked, right?”

“T-That’s...”



At the amusement park, I had my heart broken. I confessed to Konoe, and she rejected me. She said that we should stay as best friends, but things just have been awkward since.

“...Why are you asking me that? Did Konoe not tell you anything?”

“.....” Suzutsuki bit her lip.

She continued with a weak voice you would never expect to hear from her.

“She didn’t tell me anything...”

“Eh?”

“Listen, Jirou-kun. Over this past month, I questioned her over and over. Asking if something happened between the two of you. But, she’s been silent about it this entire time.”

“.....”

“Honestly speaking, this is the first time something like this happened. Never before did she go against my orders. Like this, we can’t even work according to the manual...”

“Manual?”

“...No, that’s not important right now. Please, tell me. What happened between the two of you?” She sounded oddly serious about that.

So far, she’s always been hiding her feelings behind a solid poker face, but being rejected by her butler, she might be confused. That being said...

“...Sorry, I can’t tell you.”

That was the answer I went with. I just felt like saying it myself wouldn’t be right. I mean, that would force me to accept it—the fact that I was rejected by Konoe.

“...I see, so you’ll keep it a secret from me as well.” Suzutsuki muttered with a saddened tone.

Normally, she’d forcefully make me spit it out, but...she just moved away from me. And then, a bit of silence passed.

“...Well, whatever.” She let out a sigh, and declared. “Moving in next to you was all so that I could look into that after all.”

Wha...

“You best be prepared, okay? I won’t hold back from now on.”

Ugh...

“However, I’ll let you off the hook for now. We need to settle in first. You best be working hard starting tomorrow, Jirou-kun. I don’t...plan on giving up.” She spoke with a usual devilish tone in her face, and showed a perfect smile.

“.....”

...What is this. I was worried that she might be a bit dejected and bummed out about this. Yet, we’re right back to Devil Suzutsuki. Can’t you at least let me get over my broken heart in peace?

“...That’s right, this is for Subaru’s sake as well, so I won’t give up.”

“...Eh?”

For Konoe’s sake? What is this about? However, I wasn’t given time to ask that, as Suzutsuki left the balcony. Just...for one second, and it might have been my own misinterpretation, but I could see a faint determination tainted with grief in her expression.

1 Specifically made for wax play

Chapter 3: Suzutsuki Revolution

As a bit of bonus knowledge, Masamune's apartment is pretty far away from school. That's why she's been using her motorbike in order to get to school, but since she can't take me and Kureha with her, we've been going to school by bus.

Today, it's November 12th, a Monday. Yesterday, a big incident happened, namely Konoe and Suzutsuki suddenly moving in next to us, but we still are proper high school students, so we are attending school on this weekday.

"Still~ That sure was a surprise. To think the two would suddenly move in next to us~" Kureha said, as we stepped out of the bus. "Not to mention that it's Konoe-senpai living next-door now...Kyaaa, this is like a shoujo manga!"

"To me, it's honestly more like a horror manga."

Kureha sure is relaxed about this whole thing. When we told her that Konoe and Suzutsuki moved in next to us after she came home from her training, she was all like 'Yay! Things will get more interesting now!', and enjoyed it. If every person in the world was as positive as her when it comes to the thinking process, we probably wouldn't have any wars.

"Leaving that aside. Usamin-senpai, did you move Nii-san's sleeping space into an actual room now?"

"Eh!? W-Well...it's getting colder now, so having the stupid chicken sleep outside would risk him freezing to death."

"Ah, it really has gotten cold lately. I should probably get a scarf soon."

Masamune and Kureha were having this conversation after we got off the bus, and walked towards the school gate. That's right, I was finally freed from my balcony cardboard house. That makes sense, Suzutsuki and Konoe moved in next to us, so they could easily see

what's going on over on our balcony.

"Well, I'm not exactly happy about the stupid chicken moving inside the place, but...I'll forgive you this once. We got to buy lots of eggs yesterday at the sale after all."

"So my value is the same as eggs?"

"What are you talking about? They're not normal eggs, they were eggs on discount."

"They're basically the same for me!"

"Huh!? Don't be ridiculous! Do you even know how hard I worked in order to buy these eggs!?"

"I know, because I had to do the hard work!"

Yesterday, Masamune and I went shopping at the nearby supermarket, over to the special sale. As expected, Kureha didn't make it back in time, so I had to help Masamune instead. I figured it would just be any other sale, but I was way too naive. It was a war. I felt like I stumbled into that one movie called Private Ryan or something. Put simply, the married wives stole the food and other objects on sale from one another. Masamune and I bet our lives on the line as we participated in this war. I've tagged along many times, but yesterday was absolute hell.

"Urk...!"

As the trauma of the previous day plagued me, a cold breeze passed us by. It seems like this year's winter will be much tougher than before. Even though it's barely the first half of November, I'm feeling a bit cold.

"It's gotten cold, huh." Masamune must have been thinking something similar, as she muttered with a white breath coming out of her mouth. "...I see, it's already November..."

"...Hm? Do you have some plans in November?" I asked, since Masamune's tone sounded oddly profound.

What was going on in November again? There's not really any events school-wise as far as I remember, except Christmas in December. Once the new year rolls around, we'll have the school trip.

"...I-It's not that big of a deal. Just..."

"Just?"

"...No, it's nothing." Masamune forcefully cut off the topic.

Hmmm, I wonder what's going on? Now I'm even more curious. Any other events in November...

"More importantly, be careful." Masamune suddenly warned me.

"Be careful...about what?"

"Huh? Isn't that obvious. Nobody can find out that we live in the same apartment. It's been one month, so it wouldn't be weird that you got careless."

"Ahhh, that makes sense."

Although it couldn't really be helped that me and Kureha are living together with Masamune, it would still leave a bad impression if people found out.

"Not to mention that things would become troublesome if people found out."

"Troublesome?"

"Come on, the group that basically lives off BL material with you and Subaru-sama."

"Ahh, the [Watch Over Committee]..."

The [Watch Over Committee] is also known as the [Watch Over Subaru-sam With A Warm Gaze] committee, and they are basically fanatics who believe that me and Konoe indulge in a gay relationship. Just as Masamune said, it would cause a large ruckus if they found out that Masamune and I are living together. Worst case scenario is

that they would force me to move out.

“Sakamachi, you know as well, right?”

“Aye aye, sir! No probs, chief! I can keep my mouth shut for sure!”
Kureha showed an innocent laugh.

Really now? I feel like you’re the top suspect who would blurt out something unnecessary. Then again, I have to be careful about it myself.

“Well, there’re lots of reasons to be anxious right now.” I muttered in a quiet voice so that those two wouldn’t hear me.

There’s the [Watch Over Committee] to worry about, but I can’t forget about Suzutsuki living next-door. She definitely is plotting something unholy. Not to mention that I need to finally get my relationship with Konoe under control—In order for me to call ourselves best friends, things are way too awkward. At the very least, she wants to stay that way, so I should probably get used to this distance soon enough...

“...!?”

There, right as we mixed in with a group of students, passing through the school gate, someone suddenly clung to my back. Judging from that small physique, and her aggressive personality shown in her strangling my neck, there’s only one possible conclusion.

“Good morning, Onii-chan! What’s up, what’s up, you’re so bummed out this early in the morning!”

“S-Schrö-senpai...”

I heard a voice that could come straight out of an anime next to my ears, confirming my assumption that the person I was dealing with was indeed Narumi Schrödinger. She is the older sister of the glasses junkie, also known as Narumi Nakuru, and known as this academy’s strongest.

“H-Hey! Vice prez! Why are you suddenly clinging to the stupid chicken like that!?”

The one most shocked about this wasn't even me, but Masamune. To that, Schrö-senpai tilted her head, clearly confused.

“What, Usamin? Jealous?”

“Wha...Why would you immediately assume that!?”

“Jealous, so jealous~”

“Don't make some weird song out of this! I'm not jealous at all!”

“You sound angry despite that, though?”

“I-I'm not angry. Like I care what the stupid chicken does with anybody...”

“Eh? Really? Guess I'll just hug him even more tightly then.” She said, and pressed herself onto me even stronger.

Gaaaaah! She's strangling meeee! She's putting pressure on my carotid artery, making my head spin! I might just ascend to heaven before my gynophobia even kicks innnn!!!

“Nya, Nii-san, gonna give up?”

Kureha must have felt the danger to my life, as she came to look at me. Also, can you maybe ask me before you ask so nonchalantly?

“Vice captain, I think you should let go now. Nii-san's face is all pale now.”

“Ah, crap, I took it too far.”

Immediately after, Schrö-senpai jumped away from me. I fell down on the ground, gasping for air...That was dangerous. My consciousness was about to jump out of my head. As always, she's got ridiculous arm strength despite her small stature.

“Ahaha, sorry, sorry. That was a bit too violent of a conversation, huh?” Schrö-senpai showed an innocent smile.

That's the top spot of the Rouran Academy handicrafts club's club

ranking for you, that's the kind of greeting I'd expected. Well, as the oldest son of the Sakamachi Family, I'm used to something like this.

"Vice captain, can I have a moment?"

"Hmm? What do you want, huh?"

I finally recovered, and stood up, when Kureha and Schrö-senpai started talking...Huh? Oh yeah, this is the first time I've seen those two talk with each other. Well, they're a good fit, I'd say. They must be getting along just fine...

"As always, the vice captain is so tiny!"

"Huuuh? Are you picking a fight with me?"

"No no no, of course not. Also, I've been meaning to say this for a while now, but I don't quite like that you call my Nii-san with 'Onii-chan', see..."

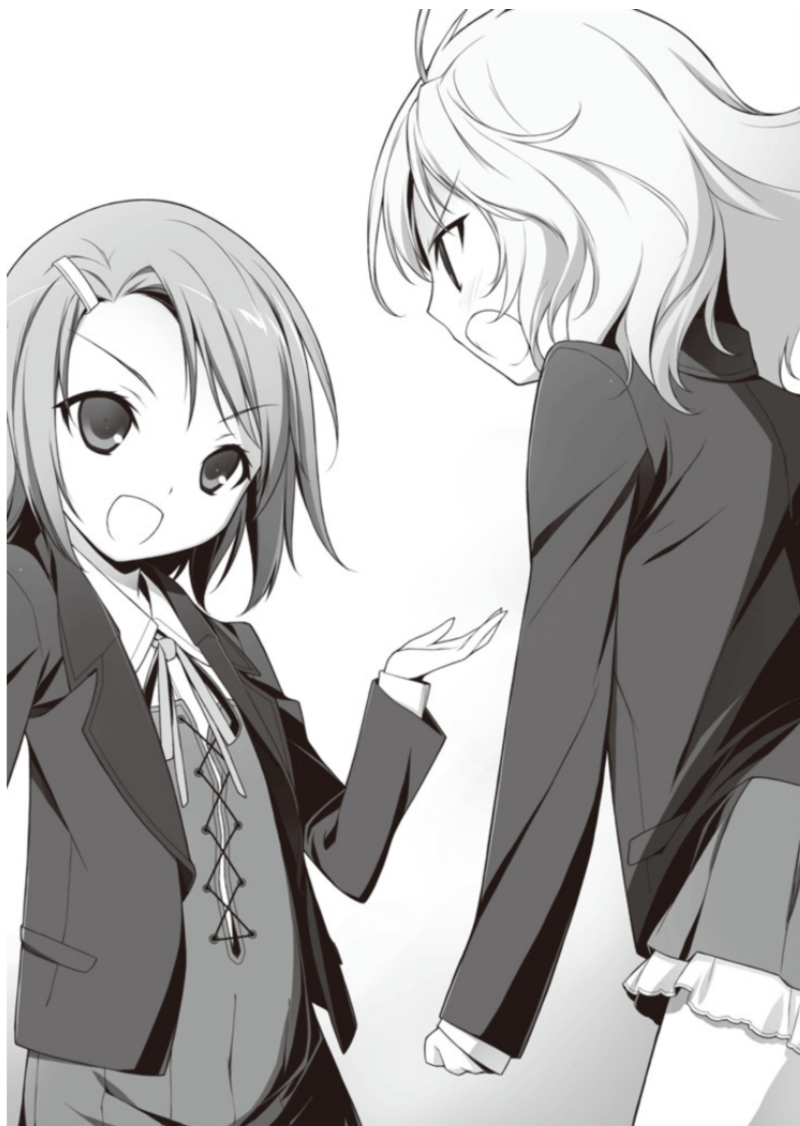
"Hey now, you sure have guts going against me like this."

"I am merely reminding you as Nii-san's actual little sister, you know?"

"...Seriously, you're as cheeky as always. Well, I don't dislike that. What's it going to be? Should we put an end to this rivalry right now?"

"Nyahaha, I don't mind?"

"....."



Let me take that back, those two are on awful terms. Also, what do you mean rivalry? That sounds like it would be straight out of a battle manga.

“Be careful, stupid chicken.”

As I was left bewildered, Masamune called out to me.

“Those two aren’t on the best of terms.”

“I mean, I can tell as much from watching this, but...What do they mean with rivalry?”

“To put it short, Sakamachi picked a fight with the vice prez right after joining the club. Back then, the vice prez won, but Sakamachi clearly couldn’t accept that.”

“Oh yeah, Kureha hates losing after all.”

“That being the case, Sakamachi would often pick a fight with the vice prez. Not to mention...”

“Not to mention?”

“How do I say this...those two are pretty similar, right? That’s why they both don’t want to lose...”

“.....”

Well, I’ve felt the same way. Both Kureha and Schrö-senpai have a lot of common attributes. They’re small, powerful, and have a cat-like atmosphere. Not to mention that they’re both declaring themselves as my little sisters. Well, Kureha doesn’t really need to, since she undoubtedly is my little sister, but Schrö-senpai calls me “Onii-chan” with no real reason to do so.

“Well, since they’re close enough to actually fight like this, their relationship isn’t that bad, and I feel like they are getting along pretty well, but...at times like these, you need to be careful.”

“Hm? About what?”

“Can you stop the two from fighting?”

“That’s...”

Impossible, yeah. Also, I’d rather not get involved in this either way. I don’t even want to imagine a battle between Godzilla and Gamera happening right in front of me. The school would end up in shatters.

“Vice captain, Nii-san is with me today, so why don’t we just have him be the judge?”

Wha?

“Not that I mind, but having him as just the judge would be a bit boring. Why don’t we try to steal Onii-chan from each other?”

Oh lord have mercy...

“Hm, sure. It’ll be little sister versus little sister.”

“Exactly. Then, let’s get this started. Don’t worry, I’ll end this before the chime rings.” Schrö-senpai showed a smirk.

“Nyaha, fine by me.”

After they exchanged a few words, they readied their fists....Ahhh, they’re dead serious now, huh!?

“S-Stop it, you two! Also, Schrö-senpai, didn’t you want something from me, or why did you call out to me like that!?”

At this rate, they might actually try to steal me from the other. What am I, some soccer ball? Will they slam me onto the ground for some touchdown? Driven by fear, I broke between the two, when Schrö-senpai thankfully lowered her fists with a “Oh, you’re right”.

“Kureha, no battle today.” Schrö-senpai turned towards Kureha.

“Ehh, what a shame.”

“Don’t be so depressed about it, I’ll give you some attention later. For now...I need to talk to your Onii-chan.” She declared with an awfully serious tone. “Hey, Onii-chan. Usamin too.” She looked at me and Masamune with an awfully serious expression. “Is it true that you two are living together?”

“...!?”

Because of this unexpected question, both Masamune and I froze up in shock. Schrö-senpai observed our reaction, and continued.

“...I mean, not like I care? Not my business what kind of relationship you two have. That being said, as your senior, let me just say one thing...Living together as high school students is taking things a bit too far, don't you think?”

“Wha...You're wrong, vice prez. We don't actually...”

“No need to try and lie about it, I already have solid proof.”

“Ah...But...”

“Hey, just be honest with me. Is there a reason for you living together? If so, then tell me, and I might be able to do something about it.”

“Urk...” Masamune bit her lip.

...This is bad. At this rate, Schrö-senpai will figure out that the three of us are living together. Also, what does she mean she's got proof? How did she...

“Senpai!”

There, I heard an awfully worried and panicked voice reached my ears. When I turned towards the source of the voice, there stood a girl wearing cat ears and glasses—Narumi Nakuru. She was clearly out of breath, as she came jogging towards us.

“...Oh god, she's here already.” Seeing her younger sister arrive, Schrö-senpai looked up at the sky.

.....Don't tell me, is this proof that Schrö-senpai talked about...

“Senpai, Nakuru wants to talk with you about something.” Nakuru took out her smartphone, and showed me the screen. “What is the meaning behind this picture?”

“P-Picture?”

I took a glance at the screen. There, I saw—Masamune and I on our way home from the shopping trip. She even took a picture of us as we walked inside the flat.

“.....”

This is bad. Is she some paparazzi? To think she'd secretly peep on us like this...!

“The thing is, Nakuru was walking through town yesterday, when she spotted Senpai and Usami-senpai walking next to each other, holding shopping bags.”

“H-Huh...”

“So, she was a bit curious and followed after you, when you two entered the flat...”

“.....”

“And, you didn't come out until the morning.”

“You were watching that entire time!?”

Let me retract my statement. She's got the potential to become a private detective. If not, she wouldn't be this thorough.

“Nakuru thought of taking the same bus with the three of you, but that was probably too obvious, so she came in late like this.”

“H-Hm, I see...”

“More importantly, Senpai...What is this about? Also, you came to school with Kureha-chan, right?”

“N-No, you're wrong, I just happened to stay over at Masamune's place...”

“Don't lie like that. Nakuru has even more proof.”

“...Proof?”

“Last night, Nakuru asked the other residents of that flat, and they said that you and Masamune are living together.”

“Why are you going this far!?”

Is she actually aspiring to become a private detective? To think she'd ask our neighbours.

"There is also one truth. What is it, Senpai? Are you really living together with Usami-senpai, already going out?"

".....!"

Nakuru asked with teary eyes. In the face of that, I could only stay quiet...What to do about this...Back in September, she confessed to me. I mean, her reason for the confession was that she wanted to gather BL material, so there's actually not a glimmer of love in there, but it's a fact that she apparently likes me despite that. That's why, finding out that Masamune and I are living together must be quite the shock for her.

"Urk...You're so cruel." Nakuru must have taken my silence as affirmation, and continued with a teary voice. "So you two are living together..."

"...Nakuru."

"Why didn't you tell Nakuru? If she had known that you shared this kind of relationship, then...Nakuru would have...!" She took a deep breath, and continued with a determined voice. "She would have come to collect data!"

"....."

...Hold on. God up in the heavens, could you maybe turn back time? I need to hear that nonsense one more time.

"Nakuru? What did you say just now?"

Masamune must have felt the same way as I did, as she asked before I could say anything. In the face of that, Nakuru tilted her head with a confused "Eh?".

"Isn't that obvious? Nakuru wants to collect data. If she were to learn more about your relationship, she would have come to your house to collect data."

“C-Collect data...for what?”

“For Nakuru’s work.”

“What do you mean by that!?”

“Eh? Even if you ask that...It’s for Nakuru’s ‘Glass Memories’ novel, you know? If she adds a love rival between Subaru-sama and Senpai, the story will surely become more interesting.”

“A rival?”

“Of course, that rival will be Usami-senpai.”

“Why!? I seriously fail to grasp what the hell you’re even talking about!” Masamune was flustered after hearing the glasses junkie’s words.

In the face of that, Nakuru merely said—

“But, you are Senpai’s mistress, right?”

“Huuuh!? W-Where did that come from!?”

“That has to be it, right? Senpai already has Subaru-sama as his lover, so even if the two of you are living together, you can merely be a mistress.”

“The stupid chicken and Subaru-sama aren’t even dating, remember!?”

“Ah. But, Nakuru wants to be Senpai’s mistress as well, so you’d have to be his number three, are you okay with that? Of course, Subaru-sama will be the number one, with Nakuru being the number two.”

“Please, listen to me! Also, why would I be the number three!?”
Masamune was fuming with anger.

No, um, Masamune-san, I don’t think that’s the part you’re supposed to be angry about. Also, that’s the glasses junkie for you, she isn’t shaken at all at the fact that the guy she confessed to is living together with another girl. Well, I bet she must be a bit shocked, but

her desire to collect data apparently is bigger than that. Hmmm, I guess that she sees me more as BL material than actually having feelings for me as a man.

“Still, to think that Usami-senpai was Senpai’s mistress. Nakuru suddenly feels the urge to write something. A boy and girl fight for the love of a single boy. Basically, this is a boy x boy x girl love triangle...Fufu, this gets Nakuru’s blood pumping.”

“And I’m saying that I’m not the stupid chicken’s mistress!”

“But, you are living together, right? Nakuru has proof.”

“T-That’s...!” Masamune also looked at the phone screen, and grew silent.

W-What kind of situation is this? This is starting to move into a dangerous direction, alright. Also, because both Nakuru and Masamune have been screaming like maniacs for a while now, more and more students have started to gather around us. In the midst of that were those of the [S4] and [Watch Over Committee].

I could hear comments along the lines of “Eh? That shitty four-eyes is living together with a girl?” or “Hell yeah, now Subaru-sama is ours again!”, clearly belonging to the [S4]. At the same time, there were also comments such as “A boy x boy x girl love triangle sounds so interesting!” or “It’s a battlefield!”, which clearly were from the [Watch Over Committee].

Either way, this situation is bad. More and more people have come to watch us. Schrö-senpai was probably trying to avoid this kind of situation. At this rate, more and more people will find out that Masamune and I are living together.

“Calm down, Nakuru! Usamin-senpai and Nii-san aren’t in that kind of relationship together.”

Surprisingly, the one to break up this situation was Kureha. That’s right, you tell them, my little sister! She’s living together with me and Masamune, so she knows what’s going on. If she just explains the truth...

“Kureha-chan, is that true?”

“Yes. Of course. NaruNaru, I’m not lying. After all...”

“...After all?” Schrö-senpai asked.

“...After all, Nii-san is...” She took a deep breath. “Nii-san is... Usamin-senpai’s pet after all!”

“.....”

—It’s over. That moment, I felt the end of my high school career right in front of me.

“H-Hey, what does that mean? I don’t get it...” Schrö-senpai seemed flustered.

“Eh? Exactly what I said, vice captain. Nii-san is Usamin-senpai’s pet. She’s not his mistress.”

“P-Pet...? I had no idea...that Onii-chan was into that sort of thing...!” Schö-senpai gave me a gaze full of contempt.

Stop! Don’t look at me that way! You’ll break my heart!

“Kureha! Take back what you just said!”

“Eh? Why, Nii-san?”

“Because people will get the wrong idea at this rate.”

“But...I’ve seen you over the past month, and you’re pretty much a pet. Even Usamin-senpai called you a pet...”

“That doesn’t mean you need to drop the bombshell here, okay!?”

What you’re saying is completely right, but sometimes you need to shut up once in a while! Because of Kureha’s words, the people around us grew noisy.

“Pet...Nakuru had no idea this would be the case. She really needs to check out Usami-senpai’s home to collect data...” She was burning with desire.

She's satisfied with everything at this point, huh?

"H-Hey, Masamune, what should we do about this?" I called out to Masamune in a quiet voice.

The crowd had grown even further. At this rate, chaos will ensue.

"....." The girl kept silent for a moment, only for her to show a determined reaction. "Don't worry, stupid chicken. I have an idea of my own."

"An idea?"

"...Yeah." Masamune nodded, and continued with a loud voice. "Nakuru, vice prez, and Sakamachi. Let me tell you the truth."

"Eh?"

The other three looked at Masamune in shock and expectation, as she continued with a determined voice.

"In fact—the stupid chicken and I are dating!"

"....."

My brain cells failed to comprehend the words I just heard, and cut out entirely...Um, Masamune-san? What in the world did you just say?

"U-Usamin-senpai, what is this about!? Wasn't he your pet..."

"I'm sorry, Sakamachi. That was a lie. After all, it would be awkward if you figured out that we're dating, despite living together with us. That's why I decided to hide it."

"N-No way..." Kureha seemed to be shocked quite a bit.



I mean, I'm just as shocked. I myself thought I was just her pet.

"...I see. That explains why Usamin and Onii-chan are living together."

"That's what this is, vice prez. We're dating, so this is pretty normal, right?"

“B-But! Senpai and Subaru-sama are dating! Why is it you two...”

“As I said, Subaru-sama and the stupid chicken aren’t dating. I’m his girlfriend after all.” Masamune puffed out her chest, sounding like she was bragging.

...I see. So basically, if she makes it so that the two of us are dating, we can explain why we’re living together. With this, most people should—

“...Nakuru won’t accept this.”

However, there was one person who still stood in our way—Narumi Nakuru. She’s the president of the [Watch Over Committee], so she clearly couldn’t accept Masamune’s words. Damn it, I don’t feel too great lying to that glasses junkie, but...What should we do? If she doesn’t believe Masamune, neither will the entirety of the [Watch Over Committee]. Then, Masamune will be regarded as my mistress, and I will be her pet. That I need to avoid at all costs...

“—My goodness, such a ruckus this early in the morning.”

There, a dignified voice broke through this chaos. When I turned towards the source of that voice, there stood—Kanade Suzutsuki. She is the daughter of the board chairman of this school, as well as the person who founded the [S4] fanclub. Of course, her butler Konoe was right next to her.

“Seems like chaos abound, Nakuru-chan.” She showed a calm smile.

She’s probably been watching this entire situation unfold from a distance, right? She probably came with the bus after the one we took, or maybe she had someone drive her here.

“Suzutsuki-senpai! Great timing! As Subaru-sama’s master, please give us your statement!”

“Statement...About what?”

“About Subaru-sama and Senpai’s relationship!” Nakuru screamed, out of breath.

Hey hey, hold your horses. This is definitely bad. I try not to think about it, but Suzutsuki is the founder of [S4], right? She's the one controlling all of the Subaru-sama fanatics at this school. Not too long ago, [S4] and the [Watch Over Committee] clashed, and created an equilibrium of peace. However, if Suzutsuki, the leader of [S4], admitted to my relationship with Konoe, chaos will ensue. After all, it's said that at least 60% of all girls are part of the [S4]. However, if Suzutsuki agrees that Konoe and I are in that kind of relationship, my position will...Hmm, how do I get out of this.

"...I'm sorry, Nakuru-chan." There, Suzutsuki spoke up. "Subaru and Jirou-kun...aren't in that kind of relationship. As his master, I can tell you that much."

"N-No way...!" Nakuru sank to the ground.

At the same time, I heard disappointed sighs from the group around us. They must be from the [Watch Over Committee]. Well, I do feel a bit bad, but it can't be helped, as that's the truth after all. Still, that's quite unexpected. I didn't think that Suzutsuki would deny this so simply. I figured she'd probably play around with me. Not to mention that the power balance between the [S4] and [Watch Over Committee] will break apart.

"That's the reality. Not to mention...The one that Subaru is dating isn't Jirou-kun." Yet, that's how she continued.

"W-What do you mean by that...?" I asked.

Not Jirou-kun? Judging from that phrasing, it almost sounded like there is someone else dating Konoe right now.

"Indeed. After all..."

There, it felt like a nuclear bomb dropped right onto our Private Rouran Academy. Suzutsuki Kanade declared, using her rose lips, the truth as she saw it.

"Subaru is dating me."

♀ × ♂

“...What?” I could only mutter in disbelief.

Of course, the other people around me were the same. Masamune, Nakuru, Kureha, Schrö-senpai, and the crowd that had formed around us...and even Konoe Subaru, we all stood there frozen after hearing those words. I mean, Konoe is acting like a boy to everybody else, so there's nothing weird about a boy and a girl dating. That being said, they are master and butler. They are in a master and servant relationship. There's no way anybody would believe that nonsense...

“T-That's a lie!”

The first one to recover was Nakuru. With the responsibility of being the president of the [Watch Over Committee], she declared these words.

“Subaru-sama dating Suzutsuki-senpai...Nakuru won't believe that!”

“My, why is that?”

“E-Even if you ask that...”

“By the way, Subaru was my first crush.”

“First crush!? So basically, your first love!?” The glasses junkie screamed in disbelief.

“.....”

No, hold on. Calm down. Suzutsuki told me that Konoe was her first love. But, she said that there's no guarantee that this first love would continue, right...

“Me and Subaru are master and butler. We've spent time together more than anybody else in this world. That's why, it wouldn't be weird for us to eventually fall in love with each other, right? We're still in high school, still young and naive.”

“Urk...That is a development that often happens in shoujo manga, but...” Nakuru bit her lip.

And then, Suzutsuki delivered the final blow.

“Not to mention...this shouldn’t be something bad for you, right?”

“...Eh?”

“I mean, we’re master and butler, sharing a forbidden love, so to speak. We’re like Romeo and Juliet. From an outsider’s perspective, this love doesn’t have a big chance to come to fruition. But, we still love each other. How do you feel about that kind of development, Nakuru-chan?”

“It’s heart-wrenching! Nakuru loves that kind of dramatic development...Ah!? Nakuru just agreed to your relationship!?”

“I can’t blame you, you’re still a girl. You would want to support the love of another girl, right?”

“Yes! Ah, but, using this Senpai x Usami-senpai x Suzutsuki-senpai x Subaru-sama for Nakuru’s Glass Memories series also sounds pretty good...!” Nakuru grinned to herself, falling into the world of her fantasies.

...This is bad. She’s lost. She was convinced by Suzutsuki. I thought she’d be the one to object the most, as she believes in the BL relationship between me and Konoe. To think she prioritized her own writing before that...! Looking around me, the people watching us seemed to be agreeing as well. They probably accepted the fact that the only person who could date Konoe was Suzutsuki after all. After all, she’s Konoe’s master.

For them, who think of Konoe as a boy, it made sense that she would fall in love with a girl this close to her. Not to mention...and I don’t know why, but Konoe had her face cast down, staying silent. In a way, that basically meant she was affirming Suzutsuki’s words...

“...!”

Stop. Don’t get washed away by this situation. Remember who this woman is. She’s Devil Suzutsuki, and she values her own enjoyment over everything else. And, her special skill is making up nonsense. She’s managed to deceive us countless times through that. Even her

act as an honor student at school is fake. That's why—this right now has to be nonsense as well. Having been her victim over and over, I can tell. There's no way those two are dating.

“.....”

And yet...why? This nonsense right now...was clearly taking it too far. Suzutsuki never came up with a lie that involved the entire school like this. However, this lie just now had far too much influence on everyone. It's gone beyond a simple prank. She's crossed the line. I don't get it. She's wandering off course. Or rather, she's completely lost it. Maybe she has another reason that would force her to date Konoe like this...

“Hey, Jirou-kun.”

There, as I was left confused and in disarray, the rich lady called out to me with a grin, and continued with a clear voice so that the crowd around us could hear her.

“Let's go on a date this weekend.”

“...Wha?”

“You heard me, a date. Or rather, a double date in this case? Me and Subaru, you and Usami-san. We have two couples here, so we should have fun together, right?”

“.....”

No no no. What the hell are you talking about? Also, there's no way that Suzutsuki's mortal enemy, Masamune, would accept such a thing...

“Fine by me, Suzutsuki Kanade. We'll go on a double date with you.”

“Huuuuuuuuuuuh!?” I screamed in disbelief.

The heck is this!? I didn't expect this! Why did you agree to her request!? Weren't you mortal enemies!?

“H-Hey, what is going on?” I called out to Masamune in a quiet

voice. “Why did you just agree to Suzutsuki’s idea like that?”

“N-No reason. Since I declared that we are dating, I thought it would seem a bit more natural that way.”

“But, you and Suzutsuki are on bad terms, right? Don’t you think that something is off? She’s clearly plotting something, yeah?”

“Urgh...You might be right, but...She said that she and Subaru-sama are going out, so...”

“...Eh?” I froze up.

‘She said that they are dating?’ What do you mean by that? You’re Usami Masamune, the nasty rabbit. Your special talent is that you can see through her lies, remember? Yet, you believe her words this easily? I seriously doubt that she was speaking the truth...

“Fufu, then that’s decided.”

Eh, seriously? They’re moving this nonsense forward while I’m still trying to catch up. I don’t even want to go on a date with them, you know? After all, it’s a double date, so...I’ll be forced to walk around her—Konoe Subaru. My broken heart still hasn’t fully healed. Yet, going on a date with her...!

“W-Wait, Suzutsuki!” In order to stop this date, I frantically called out to her.

“My, what is it, Jirou-kun?”

“Don’t ‘what is it’ me! Will you stop with this nonsense already! There’s no way that Konoe and you are dating, right!? What proof do you have!?” I screamed in a voice loud enough for the crowd around us to hear it.

That’s right, I haven’t seen any proof of them two dating. If she can’t give me any, then the others should realize that she was just making up nonsense.

“—You’re right. I still have no proof.”

She closed her mouth, leaving me perplexed. However, she immediately showed an evil smirk on her lips.

“Then, maybe I should create some proof right here, right now.”

“Huh?”

I wanted to ask just what she was talking about, but I was too late. Suzutsuki acted before me, approaching Konoe—and pressed her lips onto hers.

“Mmn!?”

Because of this unexpected kiss, Konoe let out a shocked groan. Despite that, Suzutsuki did not move away. Silence followed.

“...Fufu, how about that?”

After moving away from Konoe and her lips, the rich lady showed a devilish grin. At the same time, the audience around us raised screams of excitement and disbelief. In the midst of that, I stood frozen stiff.

“_____”

It's the Suzutsuki Revolution. I don't know who started it, but someone called the event of today, November 12th, like that, as it's been written down in the history of our school. Just as the name suggests, it was a revolutionary event changing everything we had known, brought forth by a single person.

Chapter 4: Don't look for me.

“...What should we do about this?”

That evening, as Masamune and I rode up the elevator to her apartment, I asked her.

“...Isn't it fine? Let's go on a date with them, and have some fun.”

“You're so nonchalant about this...”

“I'm not nonchalant at all, it's just that a lot happened today.”
Masamune grew quiet.

Just as she said, a lot happened—The Suzutsuki Revolution, right after Masamune announced her relationship with me. This piece of information spread through the school like a wildfire. That makes sense, both Konoe and Suzutsuki are famous all over the school, and the kiss had more than enough impact. Since we actually had classes, things called down momentarily, but naturally that didn't help with making the rumours die down.

Rumours are saying that both the [S4] and the [Watch Over Committee] stopped acting all-together. Or rather, they pretty much broke down. I don't blame them, Suzutsuki turned into Subaru-sama's girlfriend after all. Though I have to say, there are so many things that still don't make any sense.

This incident Suzutsuki caused was clearly different from any of her previous actions. It vastly crossed the line of being a mere joke or prank. Not to mention that I still don't understand why she did that. She's gone rampant. This isn't like Suzutsuki. On the outside, she played it off with a perfect poker face, but I feel like she must have been anxious on the inside. Maybe she was bothered about the secret Konoe and I have, which was because of my failed attempt at a confession?

Not to mention that Konoe didn't say anything in regards to that either. She's been her butler this entire time, but suddenly becoming

a couple is greatly crossing the limits of what I would have expected. What confuses me the most however...is Masamune's attitude. She believed Suzutsuki's nonsense head-on, and agreed to go on the double date, so her actions are the most nonsensical. She and Suzutsuki should be mortal enemies. Then there's also the part where she's oddly focused on this November...

"...Haaaa..." I sighed and resigned myself.

There's way too many questions I have yet to get answered. Not to mention that I was never the type to really think things through before I acted. I've lived my life only moving forward. That's why this situation is pretty tough to say the least. Maybe I should move directly towards Suzutsuki and try to clear up this nonsense...

"Well, this isn't so bad once in a while, right?" The second we arrived at our destination thanks to the elevator, Masamune said so with a joyful tone. "See, since I'm poor, I don't really get many chances to head out and have fun like that, so going on a date in town was something I could only look forward to. That's why, it should be fine if we just enjoy the weekend."

"I mean, sure. Just...are you fine with someone like me?"

The fact that we're dating was a lie to begin with, so I wonder how she feels? Things are pretty similar now compared to the school festival, but there were some more complicated reasons now.

"....."

We left the elevator, and as we walked down the hallway, Masamune grew silent. However, right as she opened up the room with her key...

"...I don't mind."

"Eh?"

I looked at her in shock, only to find her cheeks reddened. And then...

"L-Like I said...I don't mind if it's you...!"

“.....”

...Stop. Hold on, she's fine with me...? Does this mean...

“Ah...D-Don't get the wrong idea. I just meant that I don't have to be considerate around you since we've lived together for the past month! I didn't mean it any other way, okay! You understand!?”

“Y-Yeah.” Being pushed back by Masamune's forceful attitude, I could only nod.

...Well, that makes sense. I walked inside the living room, and turned on the lights. For a second, I thought that Masamune might actually have feelings for me, but...that can't be the case. We're friends—family after all. She's been lonely without having a family around, and Kureha and I were searching for a place to live. We're just living together in order to grant both our wishes. Even so, I feel like we did well coming to terms with each other. All because Masamune, Kureha, and I—

“...Hm?”

There, another doubt popped up inside my head. Just now, I turned on the lights in the hallway, and living room. That meant nobody else was home before us. So...where is Kureha? I haven't seen her since we split up this morning. According to Masamune, the handicrafts club had no practice today, so she should have been home before us. Maybe she met up with friends? Maybe homeroom took longer, and that's why...?

“S-Stupid chicken!”

However, my naive thoughts were immediately disproven by Masamune's panicking voice.

“L-Look at this! On the table of the living room!” She sounded like she was flustered.

I looked at the living room table, and found a single sheet of paper, approximately A4 size. Written on there was a single sentence, with adorable handwriting.

—I am leaving for a trip. Please don't look for me. By Sakamachi Kureha

“.....”

Hey hey hey hey. Hold on a damn second. Is this like I've seen in a TV drama before...the letter where she announces that she's...

“W-What should we do...She ran away from home...right?”
Masamune muttered, as she looked at the paper.

.....This isn't good. I completely forgot because of the chaos this morning, but...my little sister, Sakamachi Kureha, likes Konoe. And, she was also pretty close with Suzutsuki. As a result of that, she might have been shocked a bit too much because of this morning's Suzutsuki Revolution. On top of that, Masamune declared that the two of us are dating. Maybe...she felt awkward at being around us?

If this was me, I definitely wouldn't want to be here. Living in the same place as a couple is just...Yikes. That's probably why she decided to run away.

“...Damn it!”

“Ah...stupid chicken! Where are you going!?”

“Are you really asking me that!? I'm gonna search for Kureha!” I screamed, as I ran out of the living room.

That idiot! What do you mean ‘I am leaving for a trip’, huh!? She's clearly been influenced by those shitty TV dramas out there...!

“Calm down! Do you even know where she could have gone!?”

“Hell do I know! I'll just look through the entire town!”

“That's far too inefficient! Please, just calm down! We won't be able to find her if we start panicking...”

“My little sister ran away from home, how could I be calm about this!”

...That's right. Even if she tortures me as a punching bag every

morning, she's my blood-related little sister, my family. That's why I have to hurry!

"...Stupid chicken!"

Right as I was about to run down the hallway, towards the entrance, Masamune called out to me. Or rather, she had already clung to me in a desperate attempt to make me stop.

"...M-Masamune?"

Because of this sudden action, my brain managed to calm down instantaneously. Instead, I felt a warm sensation on my back. Immediately after, my gynophobia started activating. These two factors immediately made my head cool down. However, what helped the most in that was—

"...Don't go." She muttered with a voice about to disappear.

For some reason, Masamune started crying, as she clung to me. And, she continued with a teary voice.

"Please...don't leave me as well..."

"B-But..."

"...I know. I know that you want to look for your sister. But...don't go alone...Take me with you...Don't leave me alone again..."
Masamune declared with a teary voice.

"....."

...I see. Maybe she was scared. This emotion came to me after I've finally calmed down.

"...!"

...Shit. I'm such an idiot. I'm not the only one who's shocked that Kureha ran away. Throughout this whole month of us living together, Masamune must have formed a connection with Kureha to the point that she was devastated at this event. We've already become a family. That's why—she must have been scared. What if I didn't come home

Just as Schrö-senpai told me, all strength left my knees, and I sank to the ground.

♀ × ♂

‘Well, a lot happened today, right? You declared that you’re dating Usamin, and Subaru-sama and Suzutsuki Kanade are now dating as well. It’s a big scandal. The name Suzutsuki Revolution sure is a good fit.’

Even as I sunk down on the ground, Schrö-senpai kept talking with her anime-esque voice.

‘That being said, your sister couldn’t handle that, and came to my place.’

“...I’m sorry, if only I was a bit more careful...”

‘No need to be so down about it. You were in the center of that incident, you probably had your own problems to worry about, right?’

“...Yes. But, why did Kureha come to your home?”

‘Ahh, it’s probably because she was looking for a place to stay herself. So, she probably thought of coming to my place, since we’re fellow students and members of the same club...Right? Not to mention that this is also Nakuru’s home, so she probably felt some sort of connection here.’ Schrö-senpai said it like it was obvious.

Ahh, I see. She’s in the same class as Nakuru, and they’re part of the same club. That’s why it wouldn’t be weird for her to ask Nakuru for help.

‘You probably don’t know, Onii-chan, but Kureha’s been visiting here regularly as of late. That’s why we immediately agreed to take her in.’

“...Thank you very much. Then, I’ll go and pick her up.”

I can’t have my little sister stay at someone else’s home. With these thoughts, I offered this, but...

‘No need for that~’ Schrö-senpai immediately declined. ‘We’ll take care of her for a while. Luckily, our place is pretty big, and we have another room, so we have no problems with another person living here~’

“B-But...”

‘Not to mention, think about your feelings. Her beloved Subaru-sama has a girlfriend now, and it’s a senior she’s been fairly close with. On top of that, her own Onii-chan got himself a girlfriend as well. She’s been beaten down for sure.’

“That is true, but...”

I knew that she was the reasonable one in this case. Now that she thinks that Masamune and I are dating, it’s probably hard for her to come home. Even if she’s trained in wrestling techniques, she still is an adolescent girl. She’s at a delicate age.

‘That’s why, just let her stay here for a while. Don’t you worry, I don’t mind it if things are a bit more noisy over here. Also, my old man is happy as well.’

“Your father? You mean the company president of that toy manufacturer?”

I feel like he’s the one who led to the existence of that Silent Sheep nonsense.

‘Yeah, he was like “Now I can have someone do an endurance test on the new toys at home!”, you know.’

“Endurance test?”

‘Put simply, he plans on having Kureha do her wrestling moves on the plush toys and so on.’

“Aren’t you just making Kureha relieve her stress!?”

‘Ahaha, you can say that. She’s amazing, she’s like an endless supply of wrestling techniques. It’s better than her breaking down from the stress, right?’

“Well, you’re not wrong...”

‘Not to mention that there’s Nakuru here. She’s got a friend to console her.’

“Oh yeah, how did Nakuru take the shock from today?”

She’s the president of the [Watch Over Committee] after all. With the declaration that Masamune and I are dating. On top of that, there’s Konoe and Suzutsuki as well...

‘She seems to be a bit down, sure...but she has to work on her own stuff. She feels responsible, see. She’s got a lot of fans who read her novels. Not to mention...’

“Not to mention?”

‘Now that her desires in the 3D world are gone, she’s probably going to become more passionate about her work, right? Even if it’s different from reality, she can make her own desires come true that way.’

“I see...”

Basically, now that her BL fantasies have been crushed, she’s going to seek refuge in her novels. So...they will become even more extreme BL between me and Konoe...

‘Well, just forgive her this once. Creating stories like that is her reason for living. Also, she’s only writing the stories that her fans want to read, so she wants to make all of them happy.’

“I understand...You’re taking care of Kureha, so that’s the least I can do.”

‘Alright, negotiations complete, I’d say. Anyway, we’ll let your sister stay at our place for a bit longer. She’ll calm down eventually, so just wait until then.’

“...Thank you very much. But...I didn’t expect this.”

‘Hm? What exactly?’

“I mean, weren’t you and Kureha on bad terms?”

Even this morning, they were pretty much close to fighting. Yet, she simply accepted Kureha like this...

‘Hey now, Onii-chan.’ There, Schrö-senpai sounded a bit angry. ‘Don’t underestimate me.’

“.....”

‘Listen. I’m Narumi Schrödinger, the vice captain of the Rouran Academy handicrafts club, and the top rank in our club ranking, remember? I know how to take care of a junior of mine, so don’t look down on me like that.’

“Schrö-senpai...”

‘Not to mention, I may be fighting with your sister a lot, but we’re not on bad terms or anything like that. We wouldn’t be fighting like that if we were not that close. That’s why, just relax and leave her to us. I’m glad I found someone that will let me let out some stress.’

“.....”

‘Also...this is a bit of a personal worry, but let me change the topic a bit.’

“...What is it?”

There, Schrö-senpai continued with a serious tone.

‘Please take care of Usamin.’

“.....”

‘Just between us, she’s been a lot more cheerful lately. It’s probably because she’s been living with you and Kureha, I’m sure. She’s opened up a lot towards the club members, to the point where I would have never imagined it.’

“.....”

‘However, Usamin is still a bit anxious. That’s why, be careful, okay? You live together with her, so make sure to treasure Usamin.’

“...I understand.”

‘Also, I think you can maybe take the first step and do something a bit more lewd with her. As long as it’s not anything deviant.’

“I wasn’t planning on doing anything like that!”

Naturally, no lewd stuff either. I can’t tell Schrö-senpai, but we’re not even dating.

‘Ahaha. Well, that’s what I wanted to say, so I’ll be hanging up now. Turned into a pretty long call, huh.’

“No no no, I’m really glad about what you did for Kureha. But, can I just say one thing before we hang up?”

‘Hm? What is it?’ Schrö-senpai asked, sounding somewhat confused.

I calmly continued.

“Schrö-senpai, you’re a really good person.”

‘!’

“Honestly speaking, I’ve never met someone as kind as you. You’re even caring for your juniors like this.”

‘Wha...wha...!’

“You’re a perfect example of a senior, and a vice club president. Narumi Schrödinger, thank you very much. I’m really grateful for your kindness, Schrö-senpai.”

‘Sh...Shut up! Don’t praise me! Don’t call me kind! I told you before, but I hate being praised!’

“I’m just stating the truth, though?”

‘~~~~!? Y-You dummy! Onii-chan, you big dummy! I’m never calling you again!’ Schrö-senpai screamed, and hung up the call.

Well, I was serious about what I said. In this case, Schrö-senpai is someone I definitely need to thank in this incident.

“Still...”

That damn Deredinger-san, acting like a perfect tsundere just because is praised. Seriously...she's so damn cute.

“...Stupid chicken, were you talking with the vice prez?” Masamune called out to me, guessing who I was talking to on the phone.

Since quite some time passed, her tears had finally stopped.

“Yeah. Kureha's at Schrö-senpai's place.”

“I see, thank god...” Masamune sighed in relief.

That's right, I was finally allowed to relax as well. Now that I know where Kureha is, I don't have to worry about her anymore. Though I'm still a bit anxious about the date on the weekend, I can ignore that for another time. So for today, I'll just get some rest...

“H-Hey, stupid chicken.” There, Masamune interrupted my thoughts. “When will she be coming back?”

“Eh? Well...she'll probably stay at Schrö-senpai's place for a bit longer. Now that we're technically dating, that would probably be the best possible solution.”

Having Kureha gone like that, Masamune must be lonely, but she can still meet her at the club and school, so she should be fine.

“...Eh?”

To my surprise, Masamune seemed flustered about something. And then, she started blushing furiously.

“H-Hey, stupid chicken.”

“Hm? What's up?”

“W-Well, I was just wondering...Doesn't this mean that...it'll just be

the two of us living here?” She seemed to suppress her embarrassment to the best of her ability, as she asked me.

“.....”

...Save me, Schrödinger-san. I found myself considering running away to her home.

Chapter 5: Double Date Crisis

November 21st was a Sunday. Just as we had planned, today was the day of the double date. The time of day was 11:45am. We decided to meet up in front of a water fountain in the local park, and I was waiting for everybody else to arrive.

“Hello there, Jirou-kun. It’s only you so far?”

“Yeah...seems like it.”

The first one to come join me was Suzutsuki Kanade. She seemed to have put a lot of attention in her outfit, as she kept up her honorary, prim and proper rich lady looks. She looked like she hopped straight out of a movie.

“What’s wrong, are you lacking sleep?”

“Well...I just haven’t gotten much sleep lately.”

“You seemed close to falling asleep during school as well. Were you doing lewd stuff late at night with Usami-san?”

“No, it’s the absolute opposite.”

After Kureha ran away from home, it’s just me and Masamune in her home. Honestly speaking, it’s awkward. Extremely awkward, even. After all, we both suddenly had to be considerate of the other. However, once Kureha was gone, I realized the big change following that. First, I can’t get any sleep at night. And no, I don’t mean that in a weird way. It might be hard to imagine, but when living together with a girl, you’re just nervous, nothing more. I’ve even been sleeping during classes to get some much needed rest.

Any normal guy would probably lose to his desires, and assault the girl in question, but that’s not the case either. After all, I have my gynophobia. If I do anything of that sort, I’ll just get a nosebleed, and pass out. That’s why, over this past week, I’ve been living an awfully awkward lifestyle with Masamune. How do I say this, it feels like we

became boy and girl again, instead of just a family. We've both become conscious of each other.

"Hm, that's good at least. I heard about Kureha running away from home, so I was worried."

"You sure have guts saying that. You were the one causing all of this."

"I mean, it was fun, right?" She showed a mischievous smile.

That's right, she even came barge into Masamune's apartment to 'have fun'. Well, with more people around, it was at least less awkward. Though, I was still having trouble talking with Konoe.

"More importantly, where is Usami-san. Did you not come together with her?"

"Oh yeah, she said something along the lines of 'It's a date, so let's meet up at the location'."

"Fufu, that's awfully cute of her. She probably wants to make this feel like a date."

"Probably...Oh yeah, there is one thing I wanted to ask."

"What is it?"

"A month ago, at your own place...You said that there was a particular reason why Masamune is your mortal enemy, right?"

I remember Suzutsuki telling me. Ever since then, I didn't have much time to actually ask, but this is a good chance. If I figure out the reason why, I can maybe fix their relationship.

"...Fine, I'll tell you." Suzutsuki nonchalantly responded, and continued. "The reason why Usami-san is my mortal enemy—I don't know."

"...What?" I answered, dumbfounded.

Suzutsuki continued with a heavy tone.

“As I said, I don’t know. At the very least, what I felt at the residence, this reason why I couldn’t deal with Usami-san. I knew that it wasn’t solely because she could see through my lies.”

“.....”

It wasn’t solely because she could see through her lies? What does that mean? So, why is she bad at dealing with Masamune then?

“O-Oh yeah, what about Konoe?”

The atmosphere suddenly felt a bit too heavy for my taste, so I decided to switch the topic. Since Suzutsuki herself doesn’t know, there’s no way I would be able to figure it out.

“My, I’m a cute girl myself, you know? I said that we should arrive at the meeting spot at different times.”

““Zat so...”

We planned to meet up at 12pm. I was awfully early, so the two of us ended up alone together. But, this is just fine.

“Hey, Suzutsuki, can I ask one more thing?”

“Yes, what is it?” She responded with composure overflowing from her voice.

I didn’t hesitate much, and threw my question at her.

“Why...did you lie about dating Konoe?”

“...What do you mean by that?”

“Isn’t that obvious? Your nonsense is taking things too far. It’s calmed down a bit now, but half the school was in chaos, remember? Also, you must have realized that Masamune and I aren’t actually dating, right?”

That’s right, at first I thought she just made that up to counter the fact that Masamune and I are dating, but that’s not like her at all. It’s more than just playing around. She’s completely lost it.

“Fufufu...” However, Suzutsuki showed a teasing smile. “What are you saying? I wasn’t lying or anything.”

“Eh?”

“Basically, Subaru and I are actually lovers.”

“...But, Konoe is a girl...”

“Didn’t I tell you beforehand? She is my first love, gender doesn’t matter.”

“.....”

Hearing those words, I shuddered. It has to be nonsense again. It must be. I may not be on the level of Masamune, but I won’t be deceived by her lies again.

“...However.” Suzutsuki spoke up with a somewhat provocative tone. “Are you fine with that?”

“...What do you mean?”

“The fact that Subaru and I became lovers. Let me be honest with you. If you don’t do anything right now, I will steal her from you.”

“Steal...Konoe doesn’t belong to me.”

Indeed, I was rejected after all. That’s why, Suzutsuki may do whatever.

“...Jirou-kun.” She spoke, sounding somewhat sad. “Are you really fine with this? After all, don’t you...towards Subaru—”

There, someone interrupted her words.

“My lady!” It was a familiar alto voice.

Turning around, I spotted Konoe jogging towards us. Naturally, she was in her crossdressing style. She wore black pants with a tight shirt, and a necktie. It looked casual, but still gave off butler vibes.

“Good morning, my lady.”

“My, good morning, Subaru.” Suzutsuki gave Konoe a close look.

“Eh!? Y-Young lady!?” Konoe screamed in shock.

That made sense. After all—Suzutsuki suddenly clung to Konoe, like she was embracing her. I was shocked all the same. She wrapped her hands around her butler, speaking with a gentle tone.



“You look wonderful today.”

“...Eh?”

“Did you end up late because you were pouring a lot of effort into your appearance like this?”

“Urk...I-I’m sorry.”

“Fufu, it’s fine. I love how earnest you get when it comes to me.”

“...Ah! M-M-My lady! What are you...!?”

“What, you ask...I simply want to see even more cuteness from my butler...No, my lover.”

“B-But, in such a place...!”

“Isn’t it fine? Showing off a bit won’t hurt, especially towards Jirou-kun.” Suzutsuki said, and glanced over at me.

Master and butler, they brought their faces closer reaching the distance of a kiss, almost like they were actual lovers...

“...!”

The hell is this? My head is going crazy because of this nonsensical situation. In all probability, Konoe and Suzutsuki aren’t actually dating. That being said, they were embracing each other, like actual lovers, like they wanted to show off to me. At the same time, this scenery left me restless.

“What are you two doing?” A voice spoke up from behind me.

Standing there was Usami Masamune. She must have put a lot of attention into her appearance, as she gave off a more stylish feeling than usual. She wore higher heels than usual, with charming boots. I don’t know if it’s on purpose, but her skirt feels shorter than usual as well...It’s not my fault for looking, okay, I’m a healthy high school student, yup.

“Oh my, good day, Usami-san. You’re quite late.”

“It’s now just the time when we agreed to meet up, you know. Also, Suzutsuki Kanade, why are you clinging to Subaru-sama like that?”

“We’re dating, so that much is normal, right?”

“That doesn’t mean you can just cuddle like that in public...”

“Are you jealous?”

“Wha...why would I be!?”

“I mean, you can’t do that with Jirou-kun, right? He still has his gynophobia after all.”

“...Hmpf.” Masamune seemed angry in the face of what seemed like a provocation coming from Suzutsuki, and bit her lip.

...Eh? Masamune-san? Why are you suddenly approaching me...? Waaaaah! Don’t cling to my arm like that, you nasty rabbit!

“See, we’re just fine.”

“Hm, aren’t you two close. But, are you okay, Jirou-kun?”

“Totally. The two of us have worked on his treatment over the past month, so he’s completely fine.”

“Despite that, Jirou-kun’s face has gone quite pale, you know?”

“T-That’s not the case! Right, stupid chicken!?”

“Y-Yeah...”

While barely responding to the question, I tried my hardest to suppress my gynophobia symptoms. Surely, thanks to the treatment I’ve been getting, I can deal with this a lot better, but...because Masamune was pressing herself on me so aggressively, I could feel two soft mounds on my elbowooooooooow nevermind! It’s activating! My nosebleed is...!

“Fufu, now that everyone is here, how about we head out on our date?” Suzutsuki smiled, and moved away from Konoe.

Seeing that, Masamune also let go of me. T-That was dangerous, I almost colored the ground here in blood red.

“So, where should we go first?”

“...Suzutsuki Kanade. You brought up the idea of a double date, and didn’t even come up with a plan?”

“At times like these, a man is supposed to be taking the lead. So, Subaru, where would you like to go?”

“Me!?”

Dear Butler-kun was bewildered after suddenly being appointed as the leader. Following that, she went ‘U-Um...’ in confusion. I don’t blame her, that’s just how Suzutsuki ticks. The biggest problem is just that Konoe is a girl, not a boy.

“...Jirou.” Konoe looked over at me, like she was begging for help.

Wha, she’s passing me the ball right before the goal? I mean, I’m the only guy on her team right now, so it makes sense. That being said, talking about date locations is tough to say the least. After all, I was rejected by her. Honestly, just by talking to her, I feel depressed. Since we’re supposed to be having fun, I want to avoid that.

“...Alright, let’s grab a bite somewhere.”

“Jirou-kun, do you have a place in mind? Since this is a date, I won’t accept any conventional location, okay?”

“T-That’s right, as the boy, you need to take the proper lead.”

Oddly enough, a rich lady and a commoner got together to say that. I feel like satisfying them both will be pretty difficult...

“It’s fine, I looked into it.”

Honestly speaking, I expected this kind of development. There was a high chance that Suzutsuki asked for the men to take the lead, and Konoe surely wouldn’t be able to supply. It’s not just that I was receiving treatment for my gynophobia since this April, I also

developed a strong sense of danger.

“I see, then let’s depart.” Suzutsuki spoke with a calm tone, and held hands with Konoe.

Konoe seemed a bit bewildered at that, shrieking ‘M-My lady!?’ but didn’t try to put her hands away. Hm, that’s Konoe and Suzutsuki for you, they’re beauties in both genders. They look like a great couple. Though, it surely is just all made-up nonsense.

“...Stupid chicken...We two also...”

“Y-Yeah, you’re right.”

I heard a flustered voice coming from Masamune next to me, to which we both held hands ourselves...Yeah, if it’s just some light hand-holding, then I can get by without my gynophobia activating. Today, we’re supposed to be playing lovers. I know it’s just a lie, but I want Masamune to enjoy herself. As thanks for letting me stay over at her place. So, I need to play a good boyfriend. I don’t know what Suzutsuki is plotting, but...

“Jirou-kun, you best be escorting us properly.” Suzutsuki must have felt my anxiety, as she showed an enjoyable grin.

...I know. This isn’t just any double date. Suzutsuki’s intentions, Masamune who is hung up on November, and Suzutsuki’s relationship with Konoe. We’re all gathered here, so I want to clear up all the problems right now. If not...I feel like I’ll just go crazy.

“Then, let’s go.”

While suppressing my gynophobia symptoms, I guided the other three—Konoe, Suzutsuki, and Masamune. Two fake couples on a double date, this is just crazy, but there was no other choice but to make it a success.

♀ × ♂

That being said, I never actually went on a date with a girl. Just as a secret, but I actually spent the past week asking friends of mine about popular date spots, but all I got back was stuff like ‘Go die in a fire,

normie!’ and other insults. One even attempted to punch me. That being the case, relying on my friends ended up in failure, and I was forced to come up with a plan myself. Or rather than that, I just looked up online. Thanks to the wonderful world wide web, I could use the knowledge of millions of other people to my aid. And at the end of my thinking, I thought the best idea was to eat something.

“S-Stupid chicken...T-T-This place is...”

We took a bus from a bus stop near the park, and after fifteen minutes, we reached a certain restaurant that was right down the large main street. Seeing the billboard, Masamune was practically unable to hold back her excitement.

‘Rabbit Cafe – Rabbit Plus’

That was the name of the place. The outside looked quite fancy, and it basically looked like a place no man alone would enter. However, as this was a date, it should be fine. More than anything...

“Stupid chicken! Let’s go inside!”

“I know, I know, you don’t need to rush like that.”

“I-I’m not rushing or anything! But...but...!”

“You really love rabbits, huh? You were so enticed by the rabbit at Suzutsuki’s place as well.”

“Wha...!” Masamune seemed to be embarrassed having pointed that out, to which she blushed furiously.

That’s right, I chose this place because I knew it would make her happy—A rabbit cafe. Judging from what I could find online, there’s actually a space where you can interact with the rabbits, and another space that acts as a normal cafe. Lots of the inside and cooking is rabbit-themed. It’s pretty much the rabbit version of those popular cat cafes. Since she’s technically my girlfriend right now, I want to take her to places she’d love to see.

“Hmm, that’s a pretty adorable place you chose, Jirou-kun.”
Suzutsuki said, with somewhat of a double meaning. “But, you

matched it up with your girlfriend's taste, so you're a commendable boyfriend."

"Don't worry, I didn't just consider Masamune's taste."

"?" Suzutsuki looked confused, but the second she looked next to her, she seemed to agree.

"M-My lady! Look! There's so many rabbits!"

"...Yes, you're right, Subaru." Suzutsuki responded, sounding somewhat exhausted.

That's right, Konoe is a crossdressing girl, who absolutely adores cute stuff. I figured that she would like this sort of thing.

"Welcome."

Upon entering, a female employee wearing the cafe's uniform welcomed us. The inside was decorated in an almost oppressive rabbit theme. Table cloth, clock, wallpaper, plush toys...and many more. There seems to be a rabbit raising space in the back. It's about what I found online.

"For now, let's go eat something."

We could play with the rabbits first, but for that you'd need to wash your hands, which is a bit of a chore, so eating comes first.

"Y-Yeah, you're right..." Masamune nodded, seeming hesitant.

Her gaze was glued to the small rabbit space in the back. Hmmm, she keeps saying that she doesn't like rabbits, but she sure seems to like them despite that. The four of us sat down at an open table, and looking at the menu, it's a rabbit bargain. Of course, not to actually eat them, it's more like every dish is rabbit themed. Especially with carrots.

"Subaru, since this is a date, I was hoping you could maybe treat me today."

"Understood, my lady."

The master and servant exchanged these words. Hm, they immediately got into a date atmosphere, huh. Well, I guess it's normal that a boy would be paying on a date like this...Although I really would like to object.

“Masamune, I'm paying today.”

“Eh? R-Really?”

“Yeah, don't worry.”

I actually sold some games and manga of mine, so I have a bit of money at my disposal. Since she's poor beyond belief, I figured I should treat her.

“O-Okay...Um, stupid chicken...”

“Hm?”

“W-Well...thanks...”

“.....”

...Oh lord. Masamune being bashful as she's thanking me is unbearably cute. Calm down. The date just started, I can't receive damage this early.

“Um...I guess we should order then.”

This establishment basically asks you to pay money in order to be inside, so we ordered food first. Konoe and Suzutsuki went with pasta carbonara. Masamune and I both took the omurice with a bunny head drawn on it using ketchup. Honestly speaking, it was pretty embarrassing to order that as a man, but since Konoe and Suzutsuki went with the same menu, I just went with the same dish as Masamune. Ahh, this smile from the employee hurts even more...

It didn't take long for the employee to bring our food. Hmmm, I feel like the price is pretty high despite there not being much food. I mean, maybe it's just together with the ambience and taste. In front of me, I looked down at the plate, and the omurice. I scooped up a bite, and carried it to my mouth.....Yeah, the taste is just normal as

well. Or maybe I was just spoiled by Masamune's cooking. She's pretty good after all. However, it's perfect enough to enjoy a bit of talking. This is a date after all. That's why focusing on a conversation is...

"That was delicious."

"So fast!?"

Looking at my side, Masamune had already finished the omurice. No no no, why are you gushing it down like that?

"Now, stupid chicken, let's go check out the bunnies."

"H-Hold on, I know that this is a comparatively small omurice, but I still have..."

"Hmpf, can't be helped then, I'll feed you."

"Eh? Y-You don't need to, that's just embarrassing...Mgh!?"

I could barely finish my words, when Masamune scooped up some of my omurice, stuffing it into my mouth. Gaaaaaah, shouldn't you be doing some template 'Open wide~' while on a date!? This is more like torture!

"Mgh...guh...!"

"Come on, eat some more."

"Blegh...I-I'll eat it, okay! I will eat it, so at least let me eat it on my own!"

At this rate, I'll be killed. Fear and terror filled me up, as the omurice lessened. I can't even taste it anymore. Also, why does she still insist on feeding me? Eventually, I finished all the omurice, and forced out a painful 'T-Thanks for the food'.

"Let's go, stupid chicken."

"H-Hey, hold on a second!"

Masamune forcefully pulled me along, taking me to the rabbit space. By the way, Suzutsuki and Konoe are still eating. However, Konoe seemed to be a bit bothered at us leaving early, probably because she wanted to see the rabbits quickly as well. However, since Suzutsuki was taking her time, Konoe was bound down.

“Waaah...”

We opened the door to the rabbit space, to which Masamune let out a voice of admiration. It possessed a space of around 16m². The floor was full of cute pink carpet, with several rabbit cages standing at the walls. I see, so you choose the rabbit you'd like to play with, and take it out.

“Ah, hello.”

Upon us entering, the person who must have been responsible for this space, a young woman, greeted us. Since she looked like a university student, she may be working here part-time. As she sat on the ground, she had a brown rabbit on her lap. Masamune spotted that rabbit, and stopped moving altogether, like she fell in love at first glance.

“Would you like to touch it?”

“Can I?”

“Masamune, that's the kind of establishment this is.”

“I...I knew that! But...are you sure...Before, a rabbit disliked me, so...”

“Ah, Pyonkichi?”

That's the rabbit that managed to invade the Suzutsuki Residence a while back. We managed to capture it, but Pyonkichi (name from Konoe) was pretty scared of Masamune.

“It's fine, this one is very calm even with people around.”

“R-Really?” Carefully, almost afraid, Masamune accepted the rabbit from the employee.

She faintly embraced it in her arms. Just as the employee said, the animal didn't panic or try to escape, simply staying calm.

"S-Stupid chicken! Look! It's so docile!"

"Yeah, I'm watching."

"Not to mention...it's so fluffy, and squishy...Kyaaaa~!" Masamune screamed in joy, rubbing her cheek against the rabbit.

Despite that, the rabbit showed no reaction. Rather than being used to humans, isn't he just sleepy? His eyes look like he's about to fall asleep any moment.

"Then, I will step outside. If I can be of service in any way, please press this button. Also, if there is another rabbit you'd like to play with, just take them out of the cages." The employee said, and closed the door behind her.

She left fairly quickly, but maybe she was just trying to be considerate? After all, Masamune and I technically are a couple right now.

"...Ehehehe." Masamune's expression practically melted away, as she put the rabbit in her hands on her lap, gently caressing it.

As expected, it didn't take long for the rabbit to fall asleep. I knew it, he was just exhausted. Then again, that's the best possible scenario for Masamune, who's evidently nervous.

"Ah, this is amazing. Stupid chicken, he's asleep!"

"Yeah, must have been tired after all."

"Eh? Really? Then, maybe we should get it some medicine?"

"Stop that! I was joking. Surely, he's just used to people, like the employee said!"

"Urk...Yeah, you're right. But, I never really got the chance to touch a rabbit like this..."

“Huh, that’s pretty unexpected. You seem like the type of person who’d go to a pet shop just to see some rabbits.”

Maybe they’d even let her touch them, you know.

“Ugh...I did go there before, but...all of them just ran away from me...”

“.....”

I remember now. Pyonkichi was terrified because there was something behind Masamune that one time. Basically...Sakamoto-san, huh. Judging from what Kureha told us, that ghost should have passed on by now, so she’s not possessed anymore. That’s why she might be able to finally touch a rabbit like this. Well, that’s only if Sakamoto-san actually exists...But.

“Such a sleepy head, even though I’m giving him lots of love right now.” Masamune happily caressed the rabbits back.

...Well, whatever. Whatever the reason may be, she now gets to enjoy having a rabbit around.

“...Stupid chicken.”

There, Masamune looked up at me, while carefully keeping the rabbit on her lap.

“Um...thanks for today.”

“W-What? Where did that come from?”

“I mean, you came up with this plan for my sake, right? That’s why I thought I should at least thank you...So...thanks...” Masamune blushed bashfully.

...Crap, she’s so cute. Also, I feel like this is the first time I’ve ever seen her this honest. Just as Schrö-senpai said, living together with me and Kureha over this past month made her open up more, I guess. Before, she was unable to put faith in others. When we first met, Masamune was cold, distant, and blocked off anybody who dared to approach her—always alone. But, now it’s different.

—I want to change.

Those were the words Masamune said, back during the school festival. Ever since then, she's been working hard to get along with people. Thinking about it, the fact that she called us her family must have required a lot of courage, even if it's us who she knew. She's even been participating in the handicrafts club a lot more from what I heard.

She did change. She's able to talk with Subaru-sama, showing that she's improved from being always alone. And, that's all thanks to her hard work.

“...Ah.”

“Hm? What's wrong, stupid chicken?”

That's right, thinking about that...why did she agree to the double date today? Even if she wanted to have fun like this, she and Suzutsuki are mortal enemies. No wait, she accepted to be Suzutsuki's servant fairly easily despite that...

“Listen...” I asked...I decided to ask her. “Why did you agree to the double date today?”

“Eh? I mean...I wanted to have a bit of fun...”

“No, you and Suzutsuki are...not on the greatest of terms, right? I was just a bit curious.”

“.....” Masamune grew silent.

After this brief silence passed.

“...Stupid chicken.” She slowly spoke up. “I kept quiet about this until now, but...Will you listen to me without freaking out?”

“.....”

Ba-dump, I felt my heart skip a beat. I don't know why, but I had a horrible feeling about this. Almost like whatever she was about to tell me would completely destroy the good atmosphere we kept going.

But...

“...Alright. You can tell me.” I responded with as calm of a voice as possible.

...That’s right, I need to be of help in any way. That’s what Schrö-senpai said. She told me to take care of her. We’ve lived together for the past month after all, like a real family.

“Thanks The thing is...” Masamune spoke with a tone that seemed oddly hopeful. “...I wanted us to be friends.” She declared.

“...Eh?” I was left baffled, my mind completely blank.

Stop stop stop. She wanted to be friends...

“That’s right. I always...always wanted to be friends with Suzutsuki Kanade. That’s why I said yes today. I figured that maybe...I would be able to find a chance to get along with her...”

“.....” I swallowed my breath.

What is this about? She wants to be friends with Suzutsuki? How? Why? Aren’t you...mortal enemies...

“.....”

No...mortal enemy? Who was it that always used this term? It was Suzutsuki Kanade. She always treated Masamune like her enemy. But...what about Masamune? I seriously doubt I’m misremembering, but...Masamune never called Suzutsuki her mortal enemy, right? If so, then I must have had some horrible misunderstanding. I assumed that their feelings were mutual, but...Masamune was different. She never once treated Suzutsuki like her enemy. I just had the impression that they were both on bad terms.

But...that wasn’t the case. Masamune actually...

“—Why?” I asked. “Why did you want to get along with Suzutsuki? You always fight whenever you meet, right?”

“Urk...that’s just because I’m bad at dealing with people. Not to

mention that she's my rival when it comes to exams, so I just..."

"Well...I get where you're coming from, but still."

Masamune really is bad at dealing with people. She still shows that kind of cold attitude towards me and Kureha. That being said...

"...Yeah, I get what you're saying. Why would I want to be friends with Suzutsuki Kanade, who dislikes me this much?"

".....!"

...That's right. That's the only thing I don't understand. Normally, you wouldn't try to be friends with someone who dislikes you that much. Especially Masamune, who never tries to get along with people.

"...Fine, I'll tell you. I wanted you to hear about it yourself."

"Me?"

When I asked that, Masamune calmly nodded. And then, she slowly opened her mouth—

"Stop, Usami-san."

There, the door opened, and a dignified voice called out to us, with a glimmer of tension inside of it. The rabbit on Masamune's lap must have woken up because of that, as he ran into the corner of the room.

"Quite the interesting conversation you're having right now. Won't you let me join in?"

"S-Suzutsuki...!"

She showed a cold expression, as she looked at the two of us. Her usual smile—was nowhere to be found.

♀ × ♂

"Suzutsuki...Since when..."

"Since Usami-san said that she wanted to be friends with me. I

opened up the door a small bit, and listened in on your conversation.” She then turned towards Konoe. “Subaru, wait at the table. This is an order.” She said, and closed the door.



Konoe was probably right behind Suzutsuki. However, she couldn't go against her master, and stepped down. It's all so that she could talk with Masamune...

“Now, tell me, Usami-san.” Suzutsuki opened her mouth. “Why...did you want to be friends with me? Honestly speaking, I can’t deal with you. And, you should be aware of this, right?”

“...!”

“However, you still want to be friends with me. Why? That’s not something you would normally do. Especially knowing how you can be.”

“T-That’s...”

“Tell me, Usami-san.” Suzutsuki pressured Masamune even further.

“...!” Masamune swallowed her breath.

Silence. Once that silence passed...

“Because...” Masamune opened her mouth.

She went and opened her mouth, telling us the reason why she would want to be friends with Suzutsuki.

“We’re the same.”

“...What do you mean by that?” Suzutsuki returned an honest question.

Judging from her expression, she really did not know what Masamune was referring to.

“You mean to tell me that we are similar?”

“...That’s exactly it, Suzutsuki Kanade. On a fundamental basis, the two of us are similar. At the very least, that’s how I see things.”

“Fundamental basis?”

“...Yep. I’m saying that we both...”

—Are unable to trust others.

That’s what Masamune said, with a tone like she was in pain.

“When we went to the sea together, I felt like I saw your true personality for the first time. You always act like an honor student at school, right?”

“Correct. So?”

“Why?”

“...Because that’s much more convenient for me? It might sound nasty to phrase it that way, but when I act like a perfect human being, everybody’s evaluation of me rises.”

“...Hmm, so you keep telling yourself that. But, I think it’s different.”

“...What do you mean?”

“...Are you really asking me that? You’re not some perfect human being, nor do you want to be one. You just...are afraid of having other people see who you truly are.”

“...!” Hearing those words, Suzutsuki audibly swallowed her breath.

“I told you, right? The two of us are the same. We can’t trust people, can’t put their faith in them. That’s why you always act like an honor student. If they figured out who you truly are, they might distance themselves. That’s—the doubts you have.”

“Y-You’re wrong, I just...”

“Then, why are you acting like an honor student at school? You’re afraid of people rejecting you if you show your true face, right? But in the end, you just don’t have any friends that make you think ‘I might be fine showing them my true face’...right?”

“That’s...”

“...That’s why I wanted to be friends with you. I just couldn’t help but feel sympathy for you. Just like I didn’t let people get too close to me, you created a fake self. It’s the exact opposite of what I’ve done, and yet...”

“.....!”

“But...that’s exactly why I wanted us to be friends...because I want to save you! I want you to be with me, who always was alone at school!” Masamune declared, as she started tearing up.

“.....!”

Yeah, what she’s saying may be true. At school, Suzutsuki has been acting as the perfect honor student. But in the end...she’s just deceiving the people around her...Why would there be any need to do that? That’s...because she can’t trust other people?

‘...I don’t know.’

Right before the date, this is what Suzutsuki said. She herself didn’t know why she saw Masamune as her mortal enemy. But, now it all makes sense—Hate for people like herself. Just as Masamune felt sympathy for Suzutsuki, she probably saw herself somewhere in Masamune, and came to hate her.

“.....!”

Rather than them being mortal enemies, they were similar, and fellow minds. They acted like polar opposites, but deep down, they’re the same. That’s why Masamune wanted to be friends with Suzutsuki. Thinking about it, during the school festival, she also said ‘I always wanted to be friends with Subaru-sama’. The reason for that was because Subaru-sama was always alone back then, and Masamune now wished to be friends with Suzutsuki—

“—That’s not true!”

A sudden scream rang out. Surprisingly enough, it came from Suzutsuki herself, using an aggressive voice you wouldn’t expect from her. Honestly, this might be the first time I’ve seen her this devoid of control.

“Usami-san. As you said, the reason I put on the facade of being an honor student is because I can’t trust the people around me. However...you’re wrong. Even if I can’t trust the people around me...I’m not alone...because...”

‘Because I actually have friends I can be honest with!’. Maybe that’s

what she wanted to scream. However, mid-way through her own words, Suzutsuki suddenly grew quiet. And then, she looked over at me, like she was asking for help.

“.....”

That’s right, Konoe and I are Suzutsuki’s friends. We know how she really is, and we’re people she can always be honest with. Of course, there’s Kureha and Ichigo-san, as well as her other servants, but none of them are as close to her as Konoe and I. Of course, a big part of it is that she had to hide the fact of Konoe being a girl, so he had to deceive the people around her. That’s why the only true friends she had were Konoe and me. However...

“...!”

Now, it’s different. Both Konoe and I kept my confession and rejection a secret to her. She believed in us, but we kept it a secret from her. We stopped being honest with her. If so, then—

—“I’m going home for the day.”

Without any warning whatsoever, Suzutsuki suddenly turned around, like she was trying to run away, and opened the door leading to the cafe space.

“My lady? Did something happen?”

Through the open door, I could see Konoe’s expression for a second, but Suzutsuki immediately closed the door behind her.

“...Damn it!”

Immediately after, I took a step forward in order to chase after her... This is bad. Recently, Suzutsuki’s been way too unstable. I just knew that leaving her alone right now would be bad. That’s why I tried to run out of the room, but...

“Wait!”

Immediately after, Masamune clung to my back, stopping me. It reminded me of the time when Kureha ran away from home, she also

clung to me back then. However...

“Sorry, Masamune. I’ll be back with Suzutsuki.”

“J-Just wait! If you’re chasing after Suzutsuki Kanade, then I also...”

“It’s fine. You can’t run with these shoes, right?”

“Urk...” Masamune bit her lip.

I actually just made up that reason. I don’t know why, but it felt like things would only get worse if Suzutsuki and Masamune ran into each other again. Of course, I understand Masamune’s feelings, she simply wants to save Suzutsuki. However, Suzutsuki felt like she was seen through people, and couldn’t stand it.

“You wait here!”

“N-No! Stupid chi—”

I forcefully brushed away Masamune, and ran out, away from the animal space. Through that, I ran into the employee from before.

“D-Did something happen?” She asked me, seeming slightly flustered.

So that I wouldn’t scare her, I calmly explained.

“I’m sorry, did you see where the black-haired girl that was with us ran off to?”

“Eh...That customer just left...”

“Thank you very much!” I cut off the conversation, and ran.

That damn Suzutsuki, did she actually go home? Even after I ran outside, and tried to call Suzutsuki’s phone, I’m not getting through. Did she turn off her phone even? I observed our surroundings. Since this cafe was close to the main street, and because today was a weekend day, lots of people were walking past me...Not good, I can’t search for her here. I guess I should go back to the flat we live in. Suzutsuki said she’d go ‘home’, so the chances of her being there are high. If so, then I should go there immediately—

“Jirou!”

There, I heard a familiar alto voice, coming from Konoe Subaru. Across the street, coming from the bus stop I just thought of, was Suzutsuki Kanade’s butler.

“Konoe! Where’s Suzutsuki!?”

“S-Sorry, she ran off somewhere...” Konoe was gasping for air as she ran towards me, answering with a somewhat dejected tone.

“Somewhere...Why aren’t you with her? You’re her butler, right?”

“Urk...Well, she said ‘I want to be alone for a while, so don’t follow me. This is an order’, so...”

“.....”

Makes sense. Konoe can’t go against such an order. And yet, she still kept quiet when it came to rejecting me...

“Not to mention...not to mention...!”

“What? What happened?”

She spoke with a voice like she was about to break in tears, explaining.

“She added the following. ‘If you ignore this order, I’ll fire you as my butler’, she said.”

“Did she really say that!?”

“It...it’s the truth! That’s why...I didn’t know what to do...That was the first time Kana-chan said something to me...”

“.....”

This is bad. Suzutsuki is far more unstable than I thought. No matter how much she wanted to be alone, threatening to fire Konoe was definitely taking things too far. She should know how obsessed Konoe is with her work.

“Calm down, Konoe.”

In order to make her relax, I tried to speak with as calm of a tone as possible.

“You came from the bus stop just now, but where did Suzutsuki go?”

“...Sorry, I tried asking her, but she only said ‘Leave me alone’...”

“Then, she’s probably not gone home.”

Damn it, she probably guessed that I’d be chasing her, and hid her destination. If so, then there’s a big chance I won’t meet her even if I went home to the flat...!

“Konoe, let’s look for Suzutsuki.”

“Eh? B-But...Kana-chan might fire me...!”

“It’s fine. If you find her, contact me. As long as I go to meet her, there’s no problem, right?”

“Urk...Yeah, okay.” Konoe wiped her tears away, and nodded.

It was a rather dirty method, but that was the best I could come up with in order to make Konoe calm down.

“Konoe, you look at the places you think she might be. I’ll check the path you came from,” I said, and ran down the street.

Please, be somewhere close, Suzutsuki.

Chapter 6: Confession and Kiss

However, my wish was not granted, and the situation couldn't be worse. After splitting up with Konoe, I ran down the path I assumed Suzutsuki went, but she was nowhere to be found. On top of that, Konoe wasn't lucky either. We talked on the phone several times after that, but never made any progress. We couldn't find her. It's almost like Suzutsuki had never been there in the first place.

"...Jirou, are you okay?" Konoe muttered, clearly worried about me.

I must have had a horrible expression on my face.

"Yeah, I'm fine..." I forced myself to smile in order to reassure her.

Right now, it's 3pm in the afternoon. Since we left the cafe at around 1pm, we've been searching for Suzutsuki for around two hours now. Even Konoe and I were clearly out of breath. So, we were taking a break as we rode a bus. Even if we continued to look around inside the town, there's no guarantee that we would find her. That's the depressing conclusion we reached. Also, now that some time has passed, she might have calmed down, so we bet on the small glimmer of hope that she went back to the flat.

Of course, there was the slim chance that Suzutsuki could be running away from home like Kureha, but we prayed that this wasn't the case. She had no other place to go after all, and she didn't have any friends like Kureha does that she could rely on. The only place she could go back to is her private residence, but that would be much more convenient, because the servants working there would contact Konoe.

Not to mention...there's another reason I wanted to go back to the flat. As Konoe and I were running around, Masamune went home by herself. She sent me a message a while back, saying 'Sorry, I'll be going home first'. I can't blame her for that, the one at fault—clearly is me. That's the kind of guilt filling my chest. On top of searching for Suzutsuki without any results, I left her alone this entire time. I tried calling her from time to time, but never once did I actually get

through to her. Thinking about it, I should have returned to the cafe much sooner.

‘It’s just—Usamin still is a bit unstable.’

These words Schrö-senpai told me on the phone, and now they filled my head...Damn it. Even if I keep blaming myself, I won’t get anything out of it. For now, I had to get back to the flat, find Suzutsuki, and then apologize to Masamune. That’s what I have to do. I’m so pathetic, wasn’t there something else I could have done to prevent this situation?

“...Jirou, we’re here. We need to get off.”

“A-Ah...yeah, sorry.”

Konoe shook my shoulders, to which I came back to reality, realizing that we had arrived. The doors opened with a metallic sound, and we set foot onto the asphalt. This bus stop was near a public park. It would take around 15 minutes by foot to reach the flat from here. We should probably hurry home as quickly as possible...

“Jirou.” However, Konoe stopped me. “Can we talk a bit until we get to the flat. There’s something I wanted to ask.”

“Something you wanted to ask?” I returned the question, while picking up the speed.

Konoe gave me a simple question.

“What happened in the cafe while I wasn’t around?”

“What...”

That’s when I swallowed my breath. Everything just overlapped, I forgot to even explain the situation to Konoe. Never had the time to either.

“.....”

No, that’s not it. I simply—didn’t want to tell her. Could I really tell her about the conversation between Suzutsuki and Masamune...?

“...Sorry.” After thinking about it, these words came out of my mouth. “I don’t think I should be the one to tell you.”

“Jirou...”

“That’s why, I’m sorry...I really am. If only I had...”

“D-Don’t apologize like that! ...Don’t worry, once we go back to the flat, I’ll ask my lady. I’m a butler, and...her friend as well, so I want to hear her out.”

“...Konoe...”

All I could do was apologize. The reason Suzutsuki ended up doing all of this is because I kept it a secret that I was rejected by Konoe. That’s why I didn’t want to tell Konoe about what happened at the cafe. She’d just feel responsible again.

“Jirou.” As I was thinking that, Konoe spoke up again. “Can I...ask one more thing.”

“Hm? What’s up?”

When I returned this earnest question, Konoe slowly opened her lips.

“Are you really...going out with Usami?” She asked.

“Eh? What...do you mean by that?”

“L-Like I said, I wanted to ask if you and Usami are really dating.”

“I mean...did you not hear anything from Suzutsuki?”

She should have figured out what was going on between me and Masamune. Did she not tell Konoe?

“...She said that ‘Their relationship is probably fake. They aren’t going out yet’, but...I wanted to hear it from you as well...Since you two are living together.”

“Well, you’re not wrong.”

“Not to mention that I heard about Kureha-chan living with Nakuru-

chan for the time being. It's just the two of you right now, so I was... a bit worried." Konoe said, mumbling in the later part.

Hearing those words, something didn't feel right with me. Worried? Why would Konoe be worried about my relationship with Masamune?

"....."

No, that's obvious. We're best friends. Even if we aren't in any romantic relationship, we're best friends, so she'd be curious and worried about my own romantic relationships.

"Don't worry." I calmly declared. "She only brought that up on a whim. We are living together, but we're not in that kind of relationship."

That's right, it's all to deceive the people at school, nothing more. Also, Masamune probably wanted a reason so that she could have some fun in town like this.

"R-Really..."

Konoe sounded relieved. However, her next words stabbed right into my chest.

".....I'm glad."

"...Eh?"

...She's glad? What's that? Why? She's glad that Masamune and I aren't dating...?

"...Konoe." Calmly, I asked. "What do you mean that you're glad...?"

"Eh..."

"What problem would Masamune and I dating be for you?"

"...!? Y-You're wrong, Jirou. I wasn't relieved or anything, it's just..." Konoe started acting suspiciously.

“.....”

Maybe...she's hiding something? Something crucial that I don't know of?

“Konoe, be honest with me.” I decided to ask her directly. “Are you... hiding something from me?”

In response to my straightforward question, Konoe evidently swallowed her breath. It seems like I hit a bullseye. She's hiding something from me. Even though I thought we were close enough, best friends, that we didn't have to hide anything.

“...Why?” These words escaped my mouth.

Konoe maybe didn't hear me, as she looked at me with a puzzled look.

“Why are you hiding something from me?”

At around 100 meters away from the flat, I stopped in my tracks, and asked. Konoe seemed flustered because of that question, only to...

“Y-You're wrong! I'm not hiding anything!”

“...Really?”

“.....” Konoe awkwardly averted her gaze.

.....Maybe she's worried about something? Maybe there's something troubling her? We're still in high school, so we all have our own worries to carry, and I doubt Konoe is an exception.

“...Konoe, if there's anything troubling you, please tell me.” I asked, wanting to be a good friend. “We're friends, right? That's why, no need to hold back...Please, I want to be of help for you.”

“Urk...” Konoe grew quiet.

Even if she rejected me, our relationship isn't going to change that easily. That's why I want to be there for her. Let's help each other,

okay?

“.....Sorry.”

However, this was the answer I received back from Konoe.

“...Sorry. I’m sorry, Jirou.”

“.....”

“I’m happy for your offer, but...I can’t tell you. For the young lady’s sake, I can’t tell you...”

“.....!”

My head turned into a mushy mess. It’s something she can’t tell me? Why are you trying to be considerate of me without me knowing? Also, what do you mean it’s for Suzutsuki’s sake? Why...do you look like you’re suffering?

“.....”

No, wait...We’re the same. We’re both hiding something. I can’t tell Konoe what happened between Suzutsuki and Usami in the cafe. She can’t tell me what she’s hiding from me. We’re the same, that’s it.

“...”

But then...what kind of relationship do we have then? No, I get it. She’s not hiding this on purpose. I could tell while simply looking at her face. She most likely feels nothing but guilt about this. So then...

“.....”

Am I really...allowed to be with her? If we’re actually best friends, we should clear up all of these problems together. But, I can’t do that right now. If anything, Konoe needs to be considerate of me, as her worries clearly involve me. That’s why she can’t tell me. Even though we should be best friends...

“...Konoe.”

After a brief silence, and a lot of thinking, I made up my mind, and continued.

“Maybe we should...stop being best friends for a while?”

“—!?” Konoe swallowed her breath.

Her expression started to grow pale, and yet she tried her best to speak up.

“W-What is this, Jirou, why would you suddenly say such a thing?”

“.....” I subconsciously averted her gaze.

Honestly speaking, I myself didn't fully understand why I said that. I didn't want to say that. However, the fact that I said it out loud means that I probably wanted time. Time to think about stuff. And for that, I needed some distance from Konoe. Because of the word 'best friends', our current relationship ended up all awkward. That's why, staying away from each other is probably the best choice. We need time to clear up our own problems.

“.....”

Even if I told Konoe right now, it would probably only create a greater rift. Any more talking would hurt Konoe. And, I didn't want to see her that way, which is why I want to keep my distance from her. For the sake of both of us. Once that time passes, we surely can go back to being best friends, and get along as we have before—

“...Don't do this.”

However, a faint alto voice interrupted my thoughts. Her eyes were about to overflow with tears.

“J-Jirou...Please...I beg you...don't say that...”

“.....”

“If...if we can't be best friends anymore...then we can't be together like we have been before, right?”

“.....”

“And then...then...I wouldn't know what to do...Even if we can't be lovers, at least best friends...so that I can always be with you...” She looked at me, like she was begging for help, approaching me.



...However.

“...Sorry.”

I couldn't accept her right now. Instead, I started walking, without saying another word.

“Wha...wait, Jirou! Jirou!”

I ignored her voice, and just walked towards the flat. However, her voice kept chasing me.

“...!”

Damn it. Why? Why does it always have to end this way?

‘So that I can always be with you...’

When Konoe said that, she was crying. Large tears came streaming down her eyes. Just wait a second. Somebody stop time, please. Give me time to think. I didn't want to make her cry. I didn't want to see her tears. At the amusement park, before that parade, I realized it. That I had always liked her since April. And even now—I love her. Stand By Me, the words my father left to me. I will protect you, so stay with me. I just wanted to protect her forever...and yet...

“.....!”

Why do I keep hurting her!

“...Stupid chicken?”

Suddenly, right as we reached the flat, this voice pulled me back to reality. It was already evening, and yet the one standing in front of the flat, like she was waiting for us the entire time, was the girl I've been living with for a month—Usami Masamune.

♀ × ♂

“Masamune...” I called out to the girl, who was colored by the setting sun. “...I'm sorry. It should have been an enjoyable date, but I left you alone...” I said, and lowered my head deeply.

That's right, Masamune is the one I need to apologize to first. She

was looking forward to the date, and she was having fun. Yet...

“...No, it’s fine.” Those were the first words Masamune greeted me with. “I also...got to think a lot after what happened with Suzutsuki Kanade, and I realized a lot.”

“You realized a lot?”

“...Yeah. I wanted to tell you, which is why I’ve been waiting here.”

There, I heard footsteps next to me. Must be Konoe. She probably saw me and Masamune facing each other, and came to a halt. She wiped her tears away, and glanced at me, clearly unsure of what to do.

“Hey, stupid chicken.” Masamune fully ignored Konoe, and continued like all she could look at was me. “Can I say one thing before that? I’ve been waiting here just for that.”

“...Yeah, if you don’t mind me hearing.”

“.....Okay. The thing is...” Masamune seemed a bit bashful, as she continued. “Today...is actually my birthday.”

“...!?” I was at a loss for words.

...I see, that’s why she was so hung up on it being November. Thinking about it, this kind of fact would explain why she was fine going on a double date today. It’s because the 21st of November is her birthday.

“...Sorry, Masamune.” I apologized again.

“...Why are you apologizing?”

“I mean...you must have been looking forward to today with the date and all, right?”

“.....”

“And yet...I didn’t even realize, and just...”

I left her all alone, ruining her birthday.

“...You don’t have to apologize.”

Despite that, Masamune said the following.

“It’s true that I was looking forward to my birthday. But, I never told you about it in the first place. I was...too embarrassed to.”

“Masamune...”

That’s not true. She’s lying, surely. I’ve been living with her for the past month, she was probably just scared of having somebody find out about her birthday. A birthday is a day you spend with family and friends, receiving birthday presents, and holding a party. But, Masamune never experienced something like that. Because of her family’s environment, she never got to enjoy such simple happiness. That’s why she was scared. What if I didn’t celebrate her birthday despite knowing about it?

“...Happy Birthday.” I said, faintly but confidently. “It’s a bit late, but happy birthday, Masamune.”

“Wha...Y-You don’t need to tell me that late! Really! I was just embarrassed, so I didn’t tell you! That’s all!” Or so she said, but she was clearly happy.

Since it’s her birthday, I should at least congratulate her. I knew that this clearly wasn’t the time for that. With everything going on around, I’m still confused. There’s Suzutsuki, and Konoe next to me. That being said, this might be the first time somebody ever congratulated her. It’s her one and only 17th birthday. That’s why, as a friend, I simply wanted to do this—

“Well, leaving that aside.” Masamune continued with a serious tone.

Oh yeah, there’s something she wanted to tell me, right. I wonder what it is. Probably is related to what happened at the cafe.

“—Stupid chicken.” She slowly moved her lips, and said those words that sounded like she had practiced them over and over. “I—want to become your real family.” She said.

“Eh?”

Real family? What does she...

"When I was left alone at the cafe, I realized." As I was left baffled, Masamune continued, seemingly having made up her mind. "Being left alone like that...I was lonely. Of course I would be...we've been living together for the past month, so I was used to it."

"....."

"We became like a family. But, that won't continue forever."

"....."

"Sakamachi left, and you'll be leaving as soon as your house is rebuilt, right?"

"...Well, yeah."

Because that was the only reason we started living together like a family.

"But...I don't want you to leave. Being left alone right now, I realized. I want to always have you with me." She must have been really nervous, as even her voice was shaking.

And then, when she opened her mouth again.

"—I like you."

"...!"

Ba-dump, my heart skipped a beat. This is a confession. Even I could tell.

"...Well, to be perfectly honest, I think that I like you. I want to be with you, always. That's why I think that these are feelings of love."

"Masamune..."

"So...I want to become your real family. Because then, we can always be together."

"....."

“...Hey, stupid chicken. Today is my birthday, right? That’s why...I could ask for a present, right?”

“...I mean, I don’t mind...” Reflexively, I agreed.

The whole confession had me tripping, so I didn’t know what I was saying.

“...Okay, thanks.” Masamune said, and smiled.

Immediately after...

“...!?”

Without any warning whatsoever—Masamune pressed her lips on mine. It was a kiss, undoubtedly. This was probably the present she wanted...to kiss the boy she likes on her birthday. Knowing how she never had any friends, this was also probably her first kiss. It was an oddly feminine present a girl like Masamune could ask for.

“_____”

Colored by the setting sun, our kiss continued. We happened to kiss, and there was one person who witnessed us doing so—Konoe Subaru. When I directed my gaze over towards her, she just stared at us in disbelief, at a loss for words...It was hard to believe, but Masamune and I undoubtedly kissed, directly in this orange world we lived in.



Afterword

Been a while, I'm the guy who got wrapped up in an accident again! Name's Asano Hajime. Well, to explain it in simple terms...When I was walking through my neighbourhood, I happened to encounter...a butt-naked old man. Yes, that's what happened. I was just on my way to a nearby convenience store late at night to get a break from writing, when a single old man just came running towards me, without wearing a single piece of clothing...It felt like I was watching a horse race live and in color.

Humans sometimes can't even scream despite their shock. I just watched the man in disbelief, as he ran past me, thinking 'Was he a regular at his high school's track-and-field club or something?' in a daze. On top of that, this had to happen approximately one week before the [Mayo Chiki!] anime aired, what an awful timing, right? I can only laugh about it.

Even though, inside the novel, the protagonist and heroine are so lovey-dovey, the author runs into a butt-naked man while writing the source material...Is this supposed to be reality!? I truly felt like screaming these words out loud. When I told my friends about this, they were all like 'He must have been excited about the [Mayo Chiki!] anime!' or something along those lines, which only confused me more, but if that was true, then he was clearly too excited. I wonder what was going on with that man...I really wish I will never find out.

Alright, leaving aside that trauma of mine, [Mayo Chiki!] has reached its 9th volume! This time, we're having the Masamune cohabitation arc. On top of seeing new sides from Masamune through that, the story has moved forward by quite a bit, so the people who have yet to pick it up, I highly encourage you to bring it to the cash register and smash it down with a wrestling move!

Now then, let me move on to the thanks. First up is my editor Shouji-sama. I feel like the first person I told about this whole incident was my editor. If anything, I feel like I sent them an email along the lines

of 'I just encountered an old naked man!', so they must have felt something along the lines of 'He must be pretty tired, huh'. I'm sorry for making you worry. I'm still fine, I think. Please continue to support me in the future as well.

Next up, my wonderful illustrator Kikuchi Seiji-sama who has once again put life into the characters I envisioned, using the best and cutest illustrations there are. Especially Masamune in her long boots on the cover, focusing on her thighs! I immediately made that my PC background! Thank you very much for your work even if you're so busy!

Continued, the editor-in-chief Misaka-sama, everyone from the editorial department, the proofreader, designer, everyone involved with publishing and distribution, even the various light novel authors helping me, NEET-sensei who is responsible for the comicalization, Eichi Yuu-sensei who is responsible for the spin-off [MayoMayo!], everybody involved with the anime. Thank you very much.

[Mayo Chiki!] reached its 9th volume, and although it may be slow, I can see the climax approaching. It's all thanks to everyone supporting me. With source material, manga, spin-off, manga, the series is growing, and I hope you stick with it until the very end.

Now, let me move to the announcement corner. With the next volume, the story will move a great lot. The season is winter, and with the changing times, so do the relationships of the protagonists. In preparation for the climax, more and more developments will follow now!

At the same time, the third manga volume of [Mayo Chiki!] released on the same day as this 9th volume! We get to see even more of NEET-sensei's heartfelt drawings of our characters, so if you're interested in that, please pick it up!

Following that, I was asked to write the story for the 2nd drama CD awarded to the series [D-Frag!] by Haruno Tomoya-sensei, which is currently running in the [Monthly Comic Alive] magazine. I am truly thankful that I was allowed to continue my job from the first drama CD. It should release sometime this winter, so please be on the lookout for it.

As a bit of self-advertisement, my new series [Recommended Girlfriend For The First Time] is also running under the MF Bunko J imprint, which is another romcom as you know and love it, so if you are interested, I highly encourage you to check it out.

Well then, I personally wish that we get to see each other again, and I will be driving towards the approaching climax with full speed, no brakes, so I hope you stick with me from now on as well.

Asano Hajime

Credits

Translation Group: CClaw Translations

EPUB is done by JLN

Table of Contents

1. [Illustrations](#)
2. [Chapter 1: Sponger Days](#)
3. [Chapter 2: Neighbour Evolution](#)
4. [Chapter 3: Suzutsuki Revolution](#)
5. [Chapter 4: Don't look for me.](#)
6. [Chapter 5: Double Date Crisis](#)
7. [Chapter 6: Confession and Kiss](#)
8. [Afterword](#)
9. [Credits](#)